

RICE UNIVERSITY

**Female Sexual Identity and Characterization in Richard Strauss's *Salome***

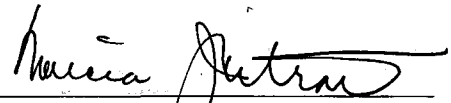
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## ABSTRACT

### Female Sexual Identity and Characterization in Richard Strauss's *Salome*

by Maria Murphy

This thesis examines the sexual development and characterization of the title character in Richard Strauss's *Salome* (1905). It contends that Salome experiences a sexual evolution—a "maturing"—that Strauss derives from Oscar Wilde's play and further emphasizes through Salome's musical language and character development. Three structural phases in Salome's sexual development are proposed: a pre-pubescent phase, a phase of sexual awakening, and a phase of dangerous sexuality. The characterization of Salome is also explored through the lens of performance theory, in an examination of the film versions of Götz Friedrich (1974), Jürgen Flimm (2004), and David McVicar (2008). In addition, the thesis applies Wildean literature on aestheticism and spirituality to Strauss's opera to show that Salome's sexual transformation presents an alternative path to self-fulfillment apart from religious salvation. Strauss's setting reveals a secular, or temporal, aestheticism that leads to an earthly spirituality.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Chapter I: *Salome in the 20th and 21st Centuries*

The dazzling cleverness and the inexhaustible wealth of colour in the score,  
the marvellous ingenuity with which every terrible detail of the scene  
or the psychology of the actors is brought home to us by the  
orchestra—these things are literally the world's wonder at present.  
-Ernest Newman<sup>1</sup>

The title character of Richard Strauss's *Salome* has captivated audiences and critics since the opera's premiere in 1905. Although female sexuality was a subject gaining attention in art, music, and culture at the turn-of-the-century, the story of a young princess who demands the head of Jochanaan (John the Baptist) on a silver charger, combined with Strauss's prodigious score, sparked profound interest in musically-inclined social circles, as well as the general public. In scholarship, *Salome* has received a wide variety of treatments but has always been considered an intriguing character. In recent years, issues concerning *Salome*'s sexuality, agency, and desire have come to the forefront in academic discussions of the opera. This thesis proposes that *Salome*'s title character experiences three phases of sexual awareness: a pre-pubescent stage, in which *Salome* is a sexually unaware young princess; a sexual awakening stage, in which *Salome* discovers her sexual desires; and finally, a sexual depravity stage, in which her sexuality turns perverse and violent. I argue that these three phases are inherent in the opera's text and score, and this thesis explores the intricate techniques Oscar Wilde and Strauss draw upon to convey *Salome*'s compelling transformation. In addition to exploring Strauss's characterization, I analyze the portrayals of the lead character by Teresa Stratas, Karita Mattila,

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest Newman, *Richard Strauss*, 2nd ed. (London & New York: John Lane: The Bodley Head, 1921), 127.

and Nadja Michael. These performers adopt this interpretation, masterfully singing the role and emphasizing Salome's three developmental phases to great effect.

### Premiere and Early Reception

Since its premiere in 1905, Strauss's *Salome* has garnered varying levels of interest in academic and popular spheres. Despite the initial surge of news articles related to its premiere in several cities, *Salome* did not receive much scholarly attention following its early years of popularity. Many of Strauss's works were initially overlooked in academic investigations and it is only in recent decades that the German composer has found his rightful place in the twentieth century as a "leader of the moderns."<sup>2</sup> David Larkin posits that this Straussian resurgence has taken place more recently because most of the criticism and praise were generated within the years he was active as a composer.<sup>3</sup> In the years surrounding the first stagings of *Salome* and *Elektra* (1909), Strauss was recognized by his contemporaries—critics, composers, and conductors alike—as original and progressive. But this initial recognition was short-lived. Alex Ross cites a "retreat from modernism" following *Elektra* as the most significant reason for the disregard for Strauss's work that would follow in most of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Despite the lack of academic study after *Elektra*'s premiere that continued well into the 1980s, *Salome* marks an important shift in scholarship regarding Strauss's body of work and is a clear demonstration of Strauss's musical aspirations.

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<sup>2</sup> Alex Ross, "Strauss's Place in the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Strauss*, ed. Charles Youman, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 195-212.

<sup>3</sup> David Larkin, review of *Die Aufführungen der Opern von Richard Strauss im 20. Jahrhundert, I: Daten, Inszenierungen, Besetzungen*, by Günther Lesnig, *Music and Letters* 91, no. 2 (May 2010): 277.

<sup>4</sup> Ross, "Strauss's Place in the Twentieth Century," 196.

Ernest Newman, one of the first scholars to recognize Strauss's skill and innovation, wrote early on that Strauss was a "master of orchestral effect,"<sup>5</sup> but largely aimed his criticism at the works before *Salome*. He refers to *Ein Heldenleben* as "the terrible *Ein Heldenleben*, the bugbear, the bogey of a couple years ago."<sup>6</sup> He adds that Strauss has a "half-dozen [...] juvenile writings," but that each work reveals another successful step toward the development of a modernist aesthetic.<sup>7</sup> Following *Salome*'s premiere, Newman comments on the broad appeal of *Salome*. He discusses the qualities of *Salome* that won Strauss recognition as an operatic composer: its absorbing narrative, large-scale orchestration, and brilliant writing. In recent years, musicologists such as Bryan Gilliam, Charles Youmans, Walter Werbeck, and James Hepokoski have recognized and highlighted the modernist mastery of Strauss's scores. Their research demonstrates that Strauss did not reject diatonic tonality, but that he reformed its uses for new, exciting approaches that would eventually lead to even more experimental innovations in the twentieth century.

Such experimental techniques made *Salome* Strauss's first major operatic success, both critically and commercially. At the premiere in Dresden in 1905, the performers received thirty-eight curtain calls.<sup>8</sup> The critical acclaim secured Strauss's position as a skilled composer of opera and *Salome* became a defining work of the modernist movement. Its success would validate Strauss's status as a master musical dramatist.

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<sup>5</sup> Ernest Newman, *Musical Studies* (London & New York: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1905), 249.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 252.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 255.

<sup>8</sup> Derrick Puffett, *Salome* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 5.

Translated almost verbatim from Wilde's *Salomé*, the text of *Salome* features a young princess who demands the head of Jochanaan (John the Baptist) on a silver charger after he rejects her romantic advances. Teeming with exotic Orientalism and eroticized violence, as demonstrated in Salome's Dance of the Seven Veils and her desire to kiss Jochanaan's severed head, *Salome* pushed the boundaries of the operatic genre. Strauss felt compelled to turn the play into an opera after seeing the Berlin premiere of Max Reinhardt's 1902 production of *Salomé* in German translation; he returned two months later to see the work again.<sup>9</sup> Strauss was methodical in his placement of the cuts in the text, creating an opera that highlights specific symbols and character relationships.<sup>10</sup> Strauss's deliberate choices suggest that he had a very clear vision of the personas his characters would assume. He once wrote that Salome should be a "young princess with the voice of an Isolde."<sup>11</sup> Strauss's statement shows that he recognized the complexity, or duality of Salome's character. Perhaps Strauss's idea of an effective, complete Salome is of a complex, multi-dimensional character who embodies both the child-like innocence of a young princess and the knowing maturity of an Isolde. Strauss's textual selections and musical setting create a clear progression in Salome's character development, which involves a journey to sexual awareness and, finally, self-fulfillment. This transformation is conveyed through the three phases of sexual development proposed in this thesis.

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<sup>9</sup> Bryan Gilliam, *The Life of Richard Strauss* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 83.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Strauss, *Recollections and Reflections*, ed. Willi Schuh, trans. L. J. Lawrence (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1953), 151.

## Insight from the Stage

The impetus for this project arose after I read various reviews of the Metropolitan Opera's 2004 production of *Salome*, featuring Finnish soprano Karita Mattila. I was struck by how many of the reviews focus specifically on Mattila's ability to demonstrate Salome's swift change from youthful, girly princess to perverse, dangerous vamp. In these evaluations, Mattila's dramatic performance is the only fundamental concern for the reviewers. The performances of supporting characters are quickly tacked onto the end of the reviews (if they are mentioned at all). Although criticism of Jürgen Flimm's "Vegas party meets desert sands" setting arises in some reviews of the production, Mattila's masterful performance seems to usurp any negative commentary that might be included. The reviews suggest that a successful production of *Salome* relies almost entirely on the soprano's ability to capture Salome's complex transition from innocuous teen to sexual heathen, while she sings one of the most difficult roles in the operatic repertoire.

In his *New Yorker* article "Mysteries of Love: Karita Mattila's Transfixing Salome," Alex Ross writes that Mattila left her audience "gobsmacked" and describes the "emotional nakedness" of her performance.<sup>12</sup> Ross also summarizes the most famous aspect of the performance. After "a devouring kiss and a scary spell of breathing," Mattila laid on her back, and with her head hanging over the lip of the stage, sang the final "Ah, I have kissed your mouth, Jochanaan" from her blood-covered mouth. Ross was one of many critics and fans to praise Mattila for her particularly energetic and emotional performance of Salome. In his *New York Times* review, Anthony Tommasini writes that Mattila's Salome was "delirious with power," and

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<sup>12</sup> Ross, Alex, "Mysteries of Love," *New Yorker*, April 5, 2004, [http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/04/05/040405crmu\\_music?currentPage=all](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/04/05/040405crmu_music?currentPage=all) (accessed March 5, 2011).

that Mattila had mastered the performance of a gawky, but alluring, adolescent through her “twitching, writhing, physically nervous portrayal” that was “100 percent hormones.”<sup>13</sup> It was widely reported that Mattila had taken on intense physical preparation to portray the sixteen-year-old princess, and her naked finale of the Dance of the Seven Veils was the focus of many reviews. Erika Kinetz writes that Mattila “invest[ed] Salome with a striking girliness. She springs petulantly across the stage. She twirls her bare toes and flounces around like a sultry, overindulged teenager.”<sup>14</sup> Peter G. Davis also praises Mattila in his piece in *New York Magazine*, describing how Mattila mastered the combination of a “lissome teenage girl with the voice of a hefty Wagnerian soprano.”<sup>15</sup> Again, Mattila’s youthful portrayal is commended when Davis comments on Mattila’s figure:

At 43, Mattila is in terrific shape—a brief glimpse of her body stripped bare at the end of the Dance of the Seven Veils reveals as much. She looks as fabulous in a clingy cocktail dress as she does in a Marlene Dietrich pantsuit while two attendants busily remove her fishnet stockings—with their teeth (yes, it’s an updated version of the opera).<sup>16</sup>

And in the *New York Observer*, Charles Michener touches on what makes Mattila’s performance so well-executed: “Ms. Mattila’s Salome is an aphrodisiac of another order—the dream-seductress whose charms suddenly turn so ghastly that you wake up in a cold sweat.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Anthony Tommasini, “Met Opera Review: ‘Salome’ Unveils Emotions (and a Soprano),” *New York Times*, March 17, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/17/arts/met-opera-review-salome-unveils-emotions-and-a-soprano.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> (accessed March 5, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Erika Kinetz, “Music; Do a Striptease, Sing a Big Aria, All in a Night’s Work,” *New York Times*, March 14, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/14/arts/music-do-a-striptease-sing-a-big-aria-all-in-a-night-s-work.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> (accessed March 5, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Peter G. Davis, “Veil Safe,” *New York Magazine*, April 5, 2004, [http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/music/classical/reviews/n\\_10095/](http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/music/classical/reviews/n_10095/) (accessed March 5, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Michener, “Flash Farewell and Sexy Hello, as Karita Mattila Gets Naked,” *The New York Observer*, March 29 2004, <http://www.observer.com/2004/03/flash-farewell-and-sexy-hello-as-karita-mattila-gets-naked/> (accessed March 5, 2011).

From these reviews, it is clear that Mattila's success is grounded in her detailed and multi-layered performance of Salome's sexual transformation. Mattila manages to portray the makeup of a character who must convey a lifetime of sexual and psychological experiences in under ninety minutes, but that is the challenge presented by this captivating and demanding work. Mattila's performance prompted me to consider the implications of Salome's journey in the opera, and how Strauss's score magnifies this transition from a pre-pubescent sexual state to a position of sexual knowledge and desire.

### **Salome's Dual Nature**

While performers and directors have approached the character of Salome on stage, scholars have also grappled with this dichotomy, seeking to identify the appropriate balance between chastity and sensuality. Lawrence Gilman, a New York music critic, speculates on this concern in his 1907 book, *Strauss' "Salome"; a Guide to the Opera, with Musical Illustrations*—one of the first literary resources on Strauss's opera. He writes that Wilde was often unsatisfied with one-sided depictions of Salome in artworks and never found a portrayal that fit his multi-faceted ideal.<sup>18</sup> It is plausible, then, that part of Wilde's motivation to write *Salomé* was to create a Salome who was dynamic and complex, and who embodied extremes of female sexuality.

Eighty-two years later, as demonstrated in Derrick Puffett's scholarly resource on the opera, the issue of balance is still a major concern. In the introduction, Puffett discusses this complicated issue. He labels Salome's two sexual dispositions, virgin and vamp, as opposing forces in her character. He proposes that perhaps even Wilde himself did not know or did not

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<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Gilman, *Strauss' "Salome"; a Guide to the Opera with Musical Illustrations* (London: John Lane Company, 1907), 20.

assume a particular balance of purity and sexuality in his construction of Salome.<sup>19</sup> In Strauss's opera, however, the added dimension of music helps identify more pronounced and structural distinctions between Salome's two conflicting sexual identities.

Strauss is often hailed as a great tone painter and recognized for his forays into extended tonality and large-scale works. Much Strauss scholarship, especially in relation to his operas, has focused on his motivic musical language; such is the case with many *Salome* studies. Although the first half of Gilman's book provides background information on the conception of the opera, citing many Salome-inspired artistic works, the second half is dedicated to Strauss's music, stressing the huge undertaking that is Strauss's ambitious score. Gilman identifies the motives for the characters, such as the "volatile, mercurial" clarinet theme representing Salome and the "discordant" and "uncouth" motive applied to the Jewish characters.<sup>20</sup> Although such hermeneutical designations can be problematic, some scholars have suggested that Strauss's leitmotivic practices are flexible within his scores. Puffett argues that although Strauss's Wagnerian use of these leitmotives is simplistic, Strauss incorporates them into his drama in a manner that continues to advance the musical idea. Strauss's motives are progressive and can signify characters and themes without being superficial or limited.

Although the leitmotiv may have been born in the nineteenth century from a Wagnerian tradition, Morten Kristiansen believes that *Salome* is the work in which Strauss delves into musical modernism.<sup>21</sup> Kristiansen acknowledges the obvious parallels with Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, in which Isolde sings to her dead lover before dying herself, but suggests that

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<sup>19</sup> Derrick Puffett, *Richard Strauss: Salome*, 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> Gilman, *Strauss' "Salome,"* 61-62.

<sup>21</sup> Morten Kristiansen, "Strauss's Road to Operatic Success," in *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Strauss*, ed. Charles Youman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 105-118.



Salome's redemption was not an option for Strauss, who believed it would be an outdated conclusion to the opera. Instead, Kristiansen believes Strauss's musical presentation of Salome takes on a Dionysian and Nietzschean quality, which humanizes Salome instead of redeeming her through death.<sup>22</sup> Although motivic material helps to establish his characters, Strauss uses this idiom in a twentieth-century context, where leitmotives are reworked to perform different functions other than merely symbolizing one idea or character.

### Recognizing Salome's Transition in Scholarship

Kristiansen's argument touches on a major issue in current scholarship concerning *Salome*: what does Strauss's setting reveal about female sexuality and the role of women at the turn of the century? Scholars have struggled to articulate which character holds power in this narrative, and what overarching theme Strauss conveys with his dynamic and unsettling portrayal of the female lead figure. Although no scholarship has specifically articulated the progression of Salome's character in a three-part transition, much of the existing research focuses on the two central transforming parts in the opera: the Dance of the Seven Veils, as an expression of her newfound sexual awareness; and her final monologue, in which she reaches the final stage of her sexuality. The existence of two pivotal moments implies a three-part transformation that Salome

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<sup>22</sup> Strauss had already begun to consider alternatives to Wagner and Schopenhauer before *Salome*. After his first opera *Guntram* (1894) failed to garner success in the operatic realm, Strauss found himself exploring new ideologies and professional relationships to inspire his compositions. He severed ties with Alexander Ritter, the composer and violinist who advocated for the music of Richard Wagner and philosophies of Arthur Schopenhauer, the influence of which is evident in *Guntram*. *Guntram*'s commercial failure marked an important junction in Strauss's operatic career. In 1901, Strauss replaced Schopenhauer psychological pessimism of *Guntram* with Nietzschean optimism in the visceral drama of *Feuersnot*. For a discussion of Strauss's turn from Schopenhauer to Nietzsche see R. Larry Todd, "Strauss before Liszt and Wagner: Some Observations," in *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and His Work*, ed. Bryan Gilliam (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press 1992 ), 3-40.

undergoes in the opera.

### **Sexual Awareness**

In the body of literature on the figure of Salome, the Dance of the Seven Veils—Salome’s physical expression of her second phase of sexual awareness—is often the most thoroughly discussed element of the opera. Lawrence Kramer argues that Salome’s dance may be another opportunity for the male gaze, and that by being the object of this gaze, Salome loses power. In his seminal work *Opera and Modern Culture*, Kramer includes a chapter on *Salome* and asserts that perhaps Salome can usurp male visual power through her dance, but it is still removed from the power of speech, which, Kramer contends, is culturally more significant than the non-verbal expression of dance.<sup>23</sup> This supports Carolyn Abbate’s argument that the visual and auditory elements of opera blur these senses for the audience.<sup>24</sup> With this in mind, Salome’s voice may be tangible or corporeal as it is communicated through the Dance of the Seven Veils.

Linda and Michael Hutcheon assume a different interpretation, wherein Salome gains power through her dance.<sup>25</sup> Hutcheon and Hutcheon propose that with ten minutes of dancing, fully supported by the orchestra, Salome’s body can communicate explicitly. They argue that by inviting—even demanding—that she be gazed upon, she is subverting the power of the male gaze and redirecting it for her own empowerment. Through her dance she is empowered by the gaze. Whereas Wilde did not provide specific details for how the dance should be performed in *Salomé*, Strauss’s score conveys a much stronger picture and lays out the foundation for the

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<sup>23</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 128-166.

<sup>24</sup> Carolyn Abbate, “Opera; or the Envoicing of Women,” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 236-58.

<sup>25</sup> Linda and Michael Hutcheon, “Here’s Lookin’ at You, Kid’: The Empowering Gaze in *Salome*,” *Profession* (1998): 11-22.

performer and choreographer. Davinia Caddy draws on this information for her article on the Dance of the Seven Veils and argues that the lack of specific directions makes the dance more susceptible to multiple interpretations.<sup>26</sup>

As demonstrated by the differing scholarly interpretations of the dance itself, it is clear that Salome's character is complex. And although these scholars interpret the power of the gaze differently—whether it facilitates or eliminates certain power structures—the dance is identified as a signifier of change within the opera and Salome's character. Whether Salome is giving in to the hegemonic gaze, rebelling against it, or repurposing it for her own empowerment, the dance finalizes the second phase of Salome's development.

### **Dangerous Sexuality**

Scholarship on *Salome* has also focused on the final stage of Salome's sexuality and the transformative moment when she asks for the head of Jochanaan. When scholars provide a reading of this section of the opera, they often extend their research to other disciplines, examining Salome through art, dance, theater, cultural studies, and psychology. In Patrick Bade's *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women* and Bram Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*, Salome is explored through a survey of artworks that feature her as a sexual and often violent figure.<sup>27</sup> The most common depictions of Salome involve her holding or displaying the severed head of John the Baptist.

Salome has also been considered in terms of medical literature from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hutcheon and Hutcheon, Kramer, and Abbate all use material from various

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<sup>26</sup> Davinia Caddy, "Variations On the Dance of the Seven Veils," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17, no. 1 (2005): 37-58.

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Bade, *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women* (New York: Mayflower Books, 1979). Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

medical treatises and studies to inform their understanding of Salome's behavior in the opera. A thorough examination of these and additional medical sources discloses contemporary perceptions about the nature of female mental and sexual health. In many contemporary medical sources, mental and sexual health are inseparable in women. Richard von Krafft-Ebing links a woman's libido with her mental health, asserting that both too much and too little sex drive can be linked to female hysteria, with only a small margin of moderate sexual activity deemed non-pathological.<sup>28</sup> Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer write about a pubertal hysteria, which afflicts young women,<sup>29</sup> and Havelock Ellis contends that female sexual impulses and desires may be stronger than previously assumed in medical discourse.<sup>30</sup> Turn-of-the-century medical discourse provides insight into the contemporary understanding of female sexuality, theorizing that women could be overwhelmed by their own sexual desires to a point of hysteria. However, this medical discussion has been challenged by more recent scholarly writings in the humanities that provide an alternative, or revisionist approach to the turn-of-the-century perception of female sexuality—one that may be better suited to an examination of Salome.

### **Modernism and the New Woman**

In *Sexual Anarchy*, Elaine Showalter argues that the differing political motivations of men and women at the turn-of-the-century generated severe conflict between the sexes, and women were often categorized as strange figures who emitted rage and pain.<sup>31</sup> This coincided

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<sup>28</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: with especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: a Clinical-Forensic Study* (Burbank, California: Bloat Books, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F. A Davis Company, 1902).

<sup>31</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy* (New York: Viking, 1990), 7.

with a resistance to early twentieth-century feminism propelled by the understanding that the female population wanted to “take over” in their pursuit of the vote. Showalter states that what was most alarming to the turn-of-the-century male population was the belief that “sexuality and sex roles might no longer be contained within the neat and permanent borderlines of gender categories.”<sup>32</sup> Showalter’s arguments provide an interesting take that can inform an understanding of Strauss’s work.

Many of Salome’s characteristics—her unashamed pursuit of her sexual desires and her assertion of bodily autonomy—are attributes associated with the “New Woman” that was feared during the cultural shift in the beginning of the twentieth century. These traits are expounded upon in Sally Ledger’s *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the fin de siècle*, which provides an analysis of the New Woman that can be applied to Salome’s position at the end of the opera.<sup>33</sup> The New Woman that Ledger describes is representative of the women who were involved in the early feminist movement in search of equality and visibility in the cultural sphere. The New Woman emerged from the nineteenth-century idea that women were contributors to a decadent social climate, and hoped to achieve more than what was accepted by women prior to the twentieth century. Petra Dierkes-Thrun makes a case for a similarly progressive interpretation of Salome in her book *Salome’s Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression*, in which she argues that Salome abandons Romantic spirituality and gains fulfillment from modernist aestheticism.<sup>34</sup> In this thesis I argue that Strauss’s realization of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>33</sup> Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester, UK.: Manchester University Press, 1997).

<sup>34</sup> Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome’s Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

Wilde's narrative adopts this perspective that secular aestheticism or an "earthly spirituality" is more valuable than the ostensibly attainable salvation from Christianity.

The chapters of the study are organized chronologically by the three phases in Salome's transformation, followed by a chapter on three diverse performances that capture this complicated transition. Chapter II, "'Wie schön ist die Prinzessin Salome': Pre-Pubescence," discusses the first phase of Salome's journey to self-awareness. It examines how Wilde and Strauss construct the opening scene to include two prominent themes that set the tone for the rest of the opera: Salome as an object of the hegemonic gaze, and the moon as a symbol for Salome. Through the connection between Salome and the moon, Strauss and Wilde present Salome as a young, child-like character at the beginning of her sexual journey. The first phase also includes adjacent introductions of Salome and Jochanaan, projecting a power dynamic between them before they even meet.

This power structure is further developed in Scene III through to the end of the Dance of the Seven Veils (five measures before rehearsal 248) to reveal development in Salome's character. Chapter III, "'Ich bin verliebt in deinen Leib, Jochanaan!': Sexual Awakening," explores how Salome, once the subject of the male gaze, becomes the gazer in her relationship with Jochanaan. Instead of pursuing the religious fulfillment that Jochanaan implores her to find, Salome experiences her sexual realization through his body—specifically his voice. In her performance, Salome embraces her newfound sexual awareness and chooses an art form—dance—to express herself as her identity changes. By choosing a bodily, secular medium of expression, Salome hints at the earthly spirituality that comes to fruition in the final scene of the opera.

Chapter IV, “‘Man töte dieses Weib!’: Dangerous Sexuality,” considers the final phase of Salome’s identity transformation, in which she eroticizes violence by kissing the decapitated head of Jochanaan. In this final stage, Salome assumes the role of femme fatale in her domination over the object of her desire. My discussion is supported by various medical discourses from the turn-of-the-century that seek to explain female behavior and sexuality through a diagnosis of “female hysteria.” Strauss provides a nuanced perspective in the final scene of the opera that, despite her death, demonstrates the power Salome has gained through her own realization that the transcendental, but secular aesthetic of art can offer fulfillment that surpasses organized religion.

In Chapter V, “Salome’s Sexual Transformation on Screen,” I examine three filmed stage productions that deploy this interpretation of Salome’s transformative character growth. Beginning with Götz Friedrich’s 1974 staged-for-film production, I consider the significance of visual cues in the film that communicate the connection between Salome (Stratas) and the moon. As their relationship changes and evolves in the production, Friedrich portrays Salome’s three stages of sexual awareness through the landscape. Flimm employs a significantly different concept for the 2004 Metropolitan Opera production of *Salome*.<sup>35</sup> Salome’s transformation covers a narrower spectrum: she is already hinting at her sexual awakening when she appears on stage for the first time. Flimm’s Salome (Mattila) searches for fulfillment in other characters but ultimately discovers fulfillment and bodily autonomy through this transformational experience. Finally, I will discuss David McVicar’s 2008 Royal Opera House staging, which clearly outlines a three-part journey in Salome’s sexual transformation. McVicar’s Salome (Michael) is starkly

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<sup>35</sup> My discussion employs the 2008 revival of Flimm’s production, which was distributed as a Met Broadcast DVD.

contrasted with Jochanaan. In a unique conception of the prophet, McVicar casts Michael Volle to depict an unstable, unreliable, and weak Jochanaan. Although Volle sings other Heldenbariton roles, his voice is not as bright and therefore reads as lighter, both vocally and dramatically. McVicar creates a humanistic Salome who is presented as a sympathetic character, despite the extreme gore of the final scene, and who seduces the audience with Strauss's entrancing score. These three productions have sparked exceptional interest in audiences and critics alike, and the careful treatments of Salome make significant headway into realizing Strauss's conception for the opera.

The portrayals of Salome by Stratas, Mattila, and Michael show the clear progression of Salome's sexual self within Strauss's composition. His score features a dynamic Salome who embraces the complexities of her sexual identity and has the conviction to pursue her own desires. Strauss recognizes the validity of these desires and goes beyond Wilde's depiction by representing the extremes of female sexuality, but also revealing the potential for temporal fulfillment.



## Chapter II: “Wie schön ist die Prinzessin Salome”: Pre-Pubescence

This chapter provides an examination of scenes I and II, which represent the first phase of Salome’s sexual development. I argue that she is in a pre-pubescent, or pre-sexual awakening stage in which Strauss conveys not only her virginal state, but also her child-like characteristics. This distinction is deciphered both textually and musically: through her unknowing attitude toward the hegemonic gaze directed at her, as well as through the use of the moon in the landscape of the work as a visual manifestation of her innocence. In addition, I will explore how Strauss highlights her youthful curiosity and depicts her child-like tantrums to get what she wants.

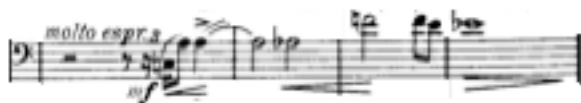
Strauss wastes no time in establishing both the title character in *Salome* and the two key symbolic elements. Without an overture, the opera begins with a curious, accidental-laden upward scale passage in the clarinet—one of the musical figures that will characterize Salome for the rest of the opera.



Example 2.1: “Salome’s clarinet motive.” Scene I, measures 1-5.

The opening vocal line introduces Salome by name when one of the palace guards, Narraboth, comments on her beauty: “Wie schön ist die Prinzessin Salome heute Nacht!” [How beautiful is

the Princess Salome tonight!]<sup>1</sup> An expressive line in the cello complements his declaration in C-sharp minor and evokes a sense of Narraboth's longing and desire.



Example 2.2: “Establishing desire.” Scene I, measures 6-9.

The second character to speak is the Page, who follows Narraboth's assessment of Salome with his own reflections on the moon: “Sieh’ die Mondscheibe, wie sie seltsam aussieht. Wie eine Frau, die aufsteigt aus dem Grab.” [Look at the lunar disc, how strange it looks. Like a woman, rising from the grave.] Narraboth seems oblivious to the Page's comments about the moon. His commentary about the strange, little princess—who, with feet like white doves, could be dancing—reveals his mind is elsewhere. The ascending chromatic line in the violins demonstrates his growing excitement, while wistful flourishes in flute and oboe illustrate his youthful feelings.

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<sup>1</sup> Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

1. Flöte.

1. Hoboe.

A-Clarinette.

1. Fagott.

Tamburin.

Celesta.

Page.

Narraboth.

(1. Pult.)

Viol. I.

die übrigen)

Viol. II.

(geteilt.)

(1. Pult.)

(2. Pult.)

Iratschen

(3. Pult.)

Salome's Clarinet Motive

(hervortretend)

Wie ei - ne

Wie ei - ne klei - ne Prinzes - sin, de - ren Fü - ße wei - ße Tau - ben sind. Man konn - te mei - nen, sie tanzt.

dim.

dim.

dim.

p

dim.

Example 2.3: “Narraboth’s fascination with Salome.” Scene I, rehearsal 1.

He is mesmerized. As he describes the dancing moon, Salome’s clarinet motive is heard “hervortretend” [prominently], this time a semi-tone lower, drawing a clear connection between Salome and the moon. The Page’s grim imagery returns in the line “Wie eine Frau, die tot ist. Sie gleitet langsam dahin.” [Like a woman who is dead. It glides slowly along.] His descending vocal line over alternating F minor and A minor chords creates an unsettling sensation of impending disaster. The presentation of the moon and the gaze within the first minutes of the opera demonstrates their significance in the characterization of Salome.

### Seeing Salome through the Hegemonic Gaze

Salome does not appear on stage in the first scene. It is not Salome who gives the

audience its first impression of her—this comes from the perspective of other characters.

Through Narraboth, the audience learns that Salome is strange, beautiful, and desirable. From the Page, the audience acquires a sense of impending trouble, which is clearly linked to the princess. This initial characterization of Salome is interrupted briefly by a sudden shift to a clashing section in D minor and E-flat minor, with short, accented dissonances in the violins, which are meant to depict Jewish religious leaders in an argument, at rehearsal 4.<sup>2</sup> Amid the ruckus, Narraboth's opening line, this time approached from the top so that the entire phrase remains in the voice's upper register, soars above the soldiers' discussion regarding the argument between the Jewish men. Narraboth is oblivious to the situation around him; he is completely entranced by Salome. When the Page warns him yet again, urging him to cease looking at Salome, he is compelled once more to proclaim her beauty. The following discussion between two soldiers reveals that Narraboth is not the only person who is staring at Salome: Herod, the Tetrarch, is also watching the princess.

The soldiers see that the Tetrarch's eyes are fixated on someone. The first soldier comments "Der Tetrarch sieht finster drein" [The Tetrarch looks somber], and asks "Auf wen blickt er?" [Who is he looking at?] The second soldier responds "Ich weiss nicht" [I do not know.] The opening clarinet motive, depicting Salome, sounds subsequently in the clarinet, English horn, and oboe (two measures before rehearsal 9). Although the soldiers do not know at whom the Tetrarch is staring, Strauss discloses the identity of this person—the object of Herod's gaze—to us through Salome's motive.

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<sup>2</sup> Although it will not be the focus of this paper, there is a significant amount of musical and textual expression referring to the Jewish faith throughout the opera. Much existing scholarship examines this issue. See Anne Seshardi, "The Taste of Love: Salome's Transfiguration," *Women and Music* (2006): 24-44; and Sander L. Gilman, "Strauss, the Pervert, and Avant Garde Opera of the Fin de Siècle," *New German Critique*, no. 43 (1988): 35-68.

As mentioned above, because Salome is off-stage at the beginning of the opera, the audience is forced to turn to the other characters to learn about the young princess. This is particularly significant when compared with the introduction of Jochanaan, which is treated entirely differently and is a major point of departure for Salome's development in the opera. Although Jochanaan is also missing from view in his introduction (because he is locked in the cistern), he has a voice. Interrupting the Page's warnings, Jochanaan's booming voice emanates from the cistern. Before Jochanaan's entrance the meter changes frequently, alternating between 4/4, 3/4, and 3/2. Once he is introduced, Jochanaan's music remains securely in 4/4 with a steady half-note pulse. There is also a distinct change in color: horns and harp play A-flat major chords over a drum roll while low strings propel Jochanaan's proclamation forward. The stately chords accompanying Jochanaan's vocal line create a hymnal effect, suggesting that he is dignified and pious.

-11- plötzlich viel ruhiger im Zeitmass.

1. 3 gr Fl. *ff sfz* *molto dim.*

2. 3. *ff sfz* *molto dim.*

2 Hob. *ff sfz* *molto dim.*

Engl. Horn. *ff* *molto dim.*

Heckelphon. *ff* *molto dim.*

1. 2. Fag. *ff sfz*

1. 2. *ppp*

3. 4. *ppp*

6 Hörner (F) *ppp*

5. 6. *ppp*

1. 2. *ppp*

4 Posaunen *ppp*

3. 4. *ppp*

Pauken. (sehr weich) *ppp*

Tamtam. *ppp*

2 Harfen. *a 2 pp*

Page. Schreck - liches kann ge - - sehn.

Stimme des Jochanaan (aus der Cisterne)

Nach mir wird Ei - - ner kom - men, der ist stár - - ker als

-11- plötzlich viel ruhiger im Zeitmass.

Bratschen. (alle) (mit Dämpfen) *pp* (Dämpfer weg)

Celli. (alle) (mit Dämpfen) *pp*

Bässe. (mit Dämpfen) *pp*

Example 2.4: "Jochanaan's hymnal entrance." Scene I, two measures after rehearsal 11.

Jochanaan's music is tonally stable with clear cadences and phrases, and his message of Christ's coming gains momentum as the repeated figure of a minor third with the text "Wenn er kommt!" [When he comes!] rises in pitch with each repetition. His final phrase cadences in A-flat major (five measures after rehearsal 14).

Unlike Salome's introductory music, which is limited to the short clarinet figure, Strauss gives Jochanaan an entire hymn, and although Jochanaan's introduction is a speech about another person—one who is greater than he—Jochanaan's entrance ultimately establishes his identity as a prophet. Just as the audience learned about Salome through the opening dialogue, the conversation between the soldiers supplies information about Jochanaan. In the short discussion, it is made clear that Jochanaan is holy and kind, and that he comes from the desert. When one of the soldiers asks to see Jochanaan, he is told that Jochanaan cannot be seen because the Tetrarch forbids it. The handling of their entrances establishes how the audience perceives each character. Salome is seen (by the other characters), not heard. The information the audience knows about her is limited to her physical characteristics, and her identifying music is a short, swift clarinet figure. Jochanaan, however, is heard but not seen. He is recognized as a prophet and he has a significant section of music that establishes his moral character.

Although the themes of exoticism and Otherness are more strongly emphasized later in the opera, they are signaled within the first phase of Salome's sexual awareness. The first scene is a harbinger of things to come: the discussion of Salome in the dialogue of scene I constructs a clear distinction between the lookers and the object. She is not only excluded from the conversation of which she is the subject, but she is also not on stage—her absence further exemplifies her Otherness. *Salome* scholars draw on theories of the male or hegemonic gaze to

demonstrate how gazing upon Salome is a significant method to Other her. Linda Hutcheon writes that there has never been another opera more “obsessed with staring.”<sup>3</sup> In “The Salome Complex,” Lawrence Kramer suggests that the gazed-at female body of Salome is subject to the sexual pleasure of looking. He refers to this “penetrating look” upon the “un-penetrated female body” as an example of scopophilia and suggests that the gaze alone has the capacity to be sexually satisfying for the looker. He calls this “the nineteenth-century version of safe sex.”<sup>4</sup> Brad Bucknell writes that the creation and representation of Salome depend upon the interaction between the verbal and the visual.<sup>5</sup> This interplay has a prominent role in this first phase of Salome’s sexual development. Because Salome is offstage, the verbal element is the first representation of Salome’s character: the gazing soldiers articulate “the visual” for the audience in their verbal description of Salome. Secondly, the physically visual element—Salome’s appearance on stage—provides another perspective with which the audience members can judge for themselves how they feel about Salome, but both the verbal and the visual contribute to the perception of Salome as an Other. The description of Salome from afar, paired with the adjacent, but contrasting entrances of Salome and Jochanaan, help establish Salome as an Other.

### **How Strange the Moon Seems**

Strauss adds yet another visual signifier to Salome’s characterization: the symbolic connection to the moon. In the first scene of his play, Wilde presents Salome’s connection to the moon through alternating lines of text referring to Salome and the moon, as mentioned earlier.

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<sup>3</sup> Linda & Michael Hutcheon, *Bodily Charm: Living Opera* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 38.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 273.

<sup>5</sup> Brad Bucknell, “On ‘Seeing’ Salome,” *ELH* 60, no. 2 (Summer, 1993): 503.



Strauss strengthens the connection musically: without long rests between phrases, Narraboth's vocal lines flow into the Page's. Although they are commenting on different things, Strauss links the ideas together to reaffirm the connection between Salome and the moon. The conversation between Narraboth and the Page also comments on the strange and beautiful moon, which portends later themes.<sup>6</sup> The moon, which is indeed not of this world, adds an otherworldly and Orientalist element to the discussion of Salome. The Orientalist aspect of *Salome* is conveyed most significantly in the Dance of the Seven Veils, but throughout the opera is rendered by way of Strauss's coloring effects and use of percussion. The symbol of the otherworldly moon and unusual orchestral timbres create an appealing effect that distinguishes Salome from the other characters onstage—perhaps transporting her into another realm. This effect is an example of Edward Said's notion that escapism and sexual fantasy are signifiers of Orientalism. He explains that Oriental clichés, such as princesses and dancing girls, can contribute to an escapist fantasy—a visit to a different world.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the opera, the moon signifies Salome's qualities that separate her from the other characters, but its most important function is to be an active participant in the stage's landscape. The audience can gauge Salome's sexual temperament through dialogue regarding the moon. It is a fundamental device in constructing her character and, therefore, her sexual development throughout the opera.

The moon has long been associated with the feminine. In Roman mythology, Diana is hailed as the goddess of the moon; in Greek mythology she is known as Artemis. Among other

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<sup>6</sup> Linda & Michael Hutcheon, *Bodily Charm*, 98.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 190.

attributes, Diana is often described as a young virgin who looks after other young females.<sup>8</sup> The moon has also been featured in artworks throughout history, often as a signifier of the feminine. Although his book *Idols of Perversity* has been criticized for using inferior and lesser-known artworks to describe the plight of women in the nineteenth century,<sup>9</sup> Bram Dijkstra presents a detailed survey of artistic depictions of women and he includes insightful analyses.<sup>10</sup> He examines works that specifically utilize the moon as a tool to make a number of statements on the nature of women: they are inactive, reflective, delicate, and translucent. Dijkstra concludes that turn-of-the-century art largely depicts women as passive, reflective creatures; moon and moonlight imagery were often employed to represent the sought-after ideal woman of the late nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

The moon also appears in medical discourse of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In *Bodily Charm*, Linda and Michael Hutcheon discuss the significance of the moon in cultural and medical texts in fin-de-siècle Vienna. Female menstruation and its implications with the lunar cycle were linked to female criminal violence, as demonstrated in Henry Maudsley's *The Physiology and Pathology of Mind* (1867). Hutcheon and Hutcheon summarize common scholarly interpretations of lunar symbolism in *Salome*: the moon sets a preferred lighting for the nocturnal settings of Herod's decadent parties; the moon is a symbol of "mythic mutability;" or,

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<sup>8</sup> Jenny Kien, *The Battle Between the Moon and the Sun: The Separation of Women's Bodies from the Cosmic Dance* (Parkland, Florida: Universal Publishers, 2003), 29.

<sup>9</sup> Lillian Faderman, review of *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* by Bram Dijkstra, *Victorian Studies* 32, no.1 (1988): 125.

<sup>10</sup> Elaine Marks, review of *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* by Bram Dijkstra, *The Journal of Modern History* 61, no.3 (1989): 584.

<sup>11</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 123.

it is a representation of the feminine extremes of the “crone (Hecate) and the virgin (Diana).”<sup>12</sup>

The relationship between the moon and the female lunar cycle has long been associated with female lunacy, or hysteria (originally thought to be caused by a dysfunction of the uterus). The moon symbolism in *Salome* incorporates all of these characteristics, predicting Salome’s lurid behavior before she even conceives of her dangerous desire. In *Salome*, the moon’s presence in the first scene is an indication of Salome’s character before she appears on stage, and in Scene II, when Salome appears, she too gazes upon the moon.

### **Seeing the Moon, Seeing Salome**

The subject of seeing or gazing upon Salome shifts as she anxiously leaves the party where her step-father, Herod, has been staring at her. Wilde’s simplistic text depicts Salome as an unknowing, innocent figure in the situation; she is not a willing participant in her step-father’s glances. Salome is unsuspecting of the motivations behind these glances and quickly changes focus to the evening’s beauty. When she finds herself outside, she expresses her relief after escaping the party. She comments on the sweet, open air, which she can breathe easily. At rehearsal 24, her commentary on the moon is light-hearted and playful.

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<sup>12</sup> Linda and Michael Hutcheon, *Bodily Charm*, 97.

1. 2. Hörer. (F)  
3. 4. Hörer.

Celesta.

1. Harfe.

2. Harfe.

Salome.

Wie süß ist hier die Luft... Hier kann ich atmen... Da

25

Variation on Salome's Clarinet Motive

(Solo.) Viol. I. (die übrigen.)

Viol. II. (geteilt.)

Br. (geteilt.)

(Solo.) Celli. (die übrigen.)

C.B.

Example 2.5: “Salome’s relief.” Scene II, three measures before rehearsal 25.

She turns to look at the moon, saying, “Wie gut ist’s in den Mond zu sehn. Er ist wie eine silberne Blume, kühl und keusch. Ja, wie die Schönheit einer Jungfrau, die rein geblieben ist.” [How good it is to watch the moon. It is like a silver flower, cool and chaste. Yes, like the beauty of a virgin who has remained pure.] In this instance, it is clear (with the connection established in the first scene) that Salome is actually reflecting upon herself. When she exclaims her excitement to see the moon, her commentary appears in D-flat major, the enharmonic equivalent to Narraboth’s opening C-sharp melody describing Salome.

überleiten wieder ruhiger Salome: *p*

Wie Flow

siehst du sie so an?  
look at her so strange?

gut ist's in den Mond zu sehn. Er  
good 'tis to see the moon! She

ist wie ei-ne sil-ber-ne Blu-me, kühl und  
is like a little sil-ver flow-er, cold and

Example 2.6: “Salome describes the moon.” Scene II, four measures before rehearsal

30.<sup>13</sup>

As she appreciates the moon's chastity, she reveals that she, too, is pure and virginal. Salome's clarinet theme is heard once again, “hervortretend,” slightly altered in the cello and viola as the moon is described. The clarinet also sounds part of the original Salome theme along with the cello and viola, clearly demonstrating that Salome's commentary on the moon is reflective of herself and her own characteristics. The first violins play an ascending chromatic line over sustained major thirds in the second violins. Salome's Otherness is again communicated through silvery tones in minor chords in flute and oboe. What Wilde conveys through symbolism in Salome's bond to the moon and through the narrative as Salome escapes from her step-father's

<sup>13</sup> I use orchestral score excerpts to illustrate elements concerning timbre and instrumentation, and vocal/piano scores to highlight elements concerning the vocal line or specific key areas.

gaze, Strauss highlights in the music. Here, as the audience forms a more genuine impression of Salome from her words, music, and presence on stage, she does not appear dangerous, or especially sexual. It is particularly important that the audience recognize these characteristics in Salome at this point in the opera, so that her pre-sexual identity is established before she encounters Jochanaan.

### **Salome as Child**

When Salome encounters Jochanaan for the first time, following their adjacent introductions, Wilde indicates Salome's youth again, emphasizing her child-like curiosity. Salome is intrigued by Jochanaan and asks who he is, if he is the man whom her step-father fears, how old he is, and if it is he who berates her mother. Strauss provides her with only sparse accompaniment, which demonstrates the simplicity and innocence of her inquisitive nature. In contrast, Jochanaan's grand declarations are expressed in rich, full textures in the orchestra. Salome is intrigued; her curiosity is fueled by his bold statements, prompting her wish to meet him: "Welch' seltsame Stimme! Ich möchte mit ihm sprechen." [What a strange voice! I would like to speak with him.] Her inquisitive nature turns forceful as she is denied access to the prophet. As she repeats her desire to meet Jochanaan, the orchestral texture is thickened and her vocal line becomes accented. The soldiers' refusal to comply only makes her want to meet him more. Her child-like curiosity is replaced with a child-like tantrum: "Bringt diesen Propheten heraus!" [Bring this prophet out!]

Like a sulking child disobeying her parent, Salome storms off and runs to Jochanaan's holding place. Upon looking into the cistern, she is struck by Jochanaan's dark and frightening

living conditions. Her horror is conveyed through a broken diminished chord E-flat/A-natural/C in low brass and a tremolo in the strings. A sustained dissonant chord C/E-flat/F hangs steadily under Salome's low-register exclamations, "Wie schwarz es da drunten ist! [...] Es ist, wie eine Gruft." [How dark it is down there! [...] it is like a grave.] Seeing the prophet's holding conditions, Salome's curiosity is piqued again and her tantrum returns full force, leading her to try new tactics to meet this strange man.

Salome's manipulation of Narraboth builds on her childish personality. In scholarship, this moment in the opera is often perceived as purely sexual. In this reading, Salome is constructed as a femme fatale early on, wielding her powers and exercising her sexual prowess over Narraboth to get what she wants. However, Salome's interaction with Narraboth could also be read as further emphasizing her juvenile temperament. When she realizes she can convince Narraboth to let her see Jochanaan, there is a distinct change of color and mood within the orchestra. It is playful, demonstrating Salome's excited attitude as she approaches Narraboth (rehearsal 49 through three measures after rehearsal 51). She has figured out how she will manipulate him to get what she is told she cannot have.

Although this interaction with Narraboth is outside the parent-child context, Salome is employing the same spoiled, childish tactics to get what she wants. At first her approach is friendly and tame: "Du wirst das für mich tun, Narraboth, nicht wahr? Ich war dir immer gewogen. Du wirst das für mich tun. Ich möchte ihn bloß sehn, diesen seltsamen Propheten. Die Leute haben so viel von ihm gesprochen. Ich glaube, der Tetrarch hat Angst vor ihm." [You will do this for me, Narraboth, won't you? I have always been nice to you. You will do this for me. I would like to meet him, this strange prophet. People have spoken so much about him. I

think the Tetrarch is afraid of him.] Her speech is not sexually charged; rather, it is clear that her determination to meet Jochanaan is fueled by her curiosity to meet the strange person about whom everyone is speaking. When Narraboth refuses, she remains persistent; her light vocal line and smooth movement through the strings soothe the dissonant sustained chord that illustrates Narraboth's worry and dread. Salome raises the stakes with a flower, a look, and a smile, but the most effective maneuver—the line that finally prompts him to summon Jochanaan's release from the cistern—is her insistence that he will obey her and do it: “Ah, wie gut du weisst, dass du tun wirst, um was ich dich bitte. Wie du es weisst! Ich weiss, du wirst das tun!” [Ah, you know well, that you will do what I ask. You know well! I know you will do it!] Narraboth concedes, and the second scene closes with Salome's exclamation “Ah!” as she reacts to Jochanaan's appearance when she sees him for the first time.

## **Conclusion**

In this first phase of Salome's sexual awareness, the audience does not fear Salome. Although Strauss does imply a connection between danger and Salome through the Page's warnings, she is not perceived as the independent or active agent of this impending doom. The first two scenes establish Salome as an engaging character: her absence in the first scene generates mystery and signifies her as an outsider or Other. The theme of the male gaze ignites interest in the audience members; they wonder why Narraboth and the Tetrach are so intrigued—even titillated—merely by looking at her. When Salome appears on stage, however, she presents herself in a different light. By describing the moon, she shows that she is chaste and young. Her desire and aggressive efforts to meet the prophet are motivated primarily by youthful curiosity—



even her manipulation of Narraboth is simply another tool the spoiled princess uses to get what she wants. Perhaps part of her interest in the prophet, especially her interest in his young age, expresses her desire for someone—maybe even a friend—to join her in her segregated space. Although Wilde's text in the first two scenes can be read as ambiguous with respect to Salome's sexual identity, Strauss's writing reinforces a characterization that is far from the Salome who will appear in the final scene of the opera.

### Chapter III: **“Ich bin verliebt in deinen Leib, Jochanaan!”: Sexual Awakening**

By the end of the second scene, Strauss has realized some of the more subtle details in Wilde’s characterization of Salome to create a curious, but innocent girl in the first phase of her sexual transformation. In my analysis, the second phase of Salome’s transition begins in Scene III, when Salome first sees Jochanaan, and extends to the end of the Dance of the Seven Veils, in which she manifests her newfound awareness of her own body, through performance. This chapter focuses on three components that first instigate then confirm Salome’s transition into a phase of sexual awareness: her first experience as “the gazer” in her conversation with Jochanaan, the lead-up to and precise moment she realizes her own sexuality, and her performance of the Dance of the Seven Veils.

These three events document Salome’s transition from an unknowing, childish phase to an adolescent phase of discovery. Strauss realizes this transition by offering new musical characterizations of both Salome and Jochanaan that are notably different from the first two scenes. Through Wilde’s “delicate” text and Strauss’s “brutal” music,<sup>1</sup> I explain how Salome gains power and agency throughout this phase. I argue that Salome discovers an earthly brand of spirituality (or anti-spirituality), and that Strauss’s musical setting embodies the ideals Wilde sought to create through his characterization of the young Judean Princess.

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, “Staging the Female Body: Richard Strauss’s *Salome*,” in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 209.

## Reversing the Gaze

When Scene III begins, Salome has just laid her eyes upon Jochanaan for the first time as he emerges from the cistern. Over sustained C Major harmony, tremolos in the violins and a descending fourth pattern, ending with a tritone, played by oboes, English horn, and heckelphone, set the tentative, but anxious atmosphere of the scene.

Third scene.  
Dritte Scene.  
Breit. (♩ = 6 des ¾ Metr. ♩ = 76)  
8. Andante  
trem.

(Salomé looks at him and steps slowly back)  
(Salome, in seinen Anblick versunken, weicht langsam vor ihm zurück)

Decending Fourth

G-D-sharp tritone

espr.

The image shows a musical score for the beginning of Scene III. It features a piano (p) part with a tremolo in the strings and a descending fourth pattern in the oboes, English horn, and heckelphone. The tempo is marked 'Andante' (8. Andante) and the meter is 3/4. The key signature is C major. The score includes German and English stage directions: '(Salomé looks at him and steps slowly back)' and '(Salome, in seinen Anblick versunken, weicht langsam vor ihm zurück)'. The music ends with a 'G-D-sharp tritone' and a 'espr.' (espressivo) marking.

Example 3.1: “Jochanaan’s descending fourths and tritone motive.” Scene III.

As the strings execute a tremolo, six horns play Jochanaan’s “hymn” and the prophet immediately begins pontificating, calling he who has sinned to come hear his proclamations. The familiar horn theme is also accompanied by some variations from Jochanaan’s music in the first scene. His line is harmonically less stable, with more accidentals and dissonant intervals. Whereas Jochanaan’s vocal lines in the first scene appear in conventional, clear phrasing, upon his departure from the cistern he begins many of his phrases with eighth notes on weak beats. The passage appears with faster rhythmic pacing and increased chromaticism in the orchestration.

67

Joch.  
Joch.

in ei-nem Sil-ber-man-tel ster - - ben wird? Heisst ihn  
shall die wrapped in a robe of sil - - - ver? Bid him

cresc.

her - kom-men, auf dass er die Stim - - me Des - sen hö - re,  
come for-ward dim. mf that he may hear the migh - ty voice of him

ff

Example 3.2: “Signs of Jochanaan’s instability.” Scene III, one measure before rehearsal 66.

Despite the slightly reduced stability of his phrases, Jochanaan still manages to cadence (in D Major), and the ominous tritone that preceded his entrance is resolved. He continues: “Wo ist sie, die sich hingab der Lust ihre Augen, die gestanden hat vor buntgemalten Männerbildern und Gesandte in’s Land der Chaldäer schickte?” [Who is she who succumbed to the lust of her body, who beheld the painted scenes of naked warriors, sent her messengers into Babylon?] Salome recognizes that Jochanaan is speaking about her mother Herodias, and she is disturbed, saying, “Er ist schrecklich. Er ist wirklich schrecklich.” [He is awful. He is truly awful.] In spite of her initial fright, she is also intrigued, as she asks, “Glaubt ihr, dass er noch einmal sprechen wird?” [Do you think he will speak again?] As Jochanaan does continue to speak, the orchestra’s support becomes even less stable. His text is increasingly verbose, with his vocal line moving in and out of sync with the orchestra as he continues to ramble. Salome proceeds to comment on his appearance, with growing excitement: “Wie abgezehrt er ist! Er ist wie ein

Bildnis aus Elfenbein. Gewiss ist er keusch wie der Mond. Sein Fleisch muss sehr kühl sein, kühl wie Elfenbein. Ich möchte ihn näher beseh'n. (...) Ich muss ihn näher beseh'n." [How gaunt he is! He is like a portrait of ivory. Surely he is as chaste as the moon. His flesh must be very cool, cool as ivory. I would like to look at him more closely. (...) I would like to look at him more closely.]

Salome is not the object of the gaze in this excerpt of the text; she is gazing upon Jochanaan. Furthermore, unlike the limited observations (concerning Salome) expressed in the first two scenes, Salome's observations of Jochanaan are more sensitive. She sees his poor health and also perceives that he is chaste and refreshing. By comparing him to the moon, Salome repurposes the moon (the symbol that she associates with herself) for Jochanaan—a person whom she recognizes as someone who shares similar characteristics, and whom she views as a potential companion.

Jochanaan's criticism of Herodias's deplorable sexual deviance is the catalyst for the sexual language within the opera. Salome is surprised by his sexually explicit declamations, but she is also curious and wishes to know more about the prophet. Having noticed her staring at him, Jochanaan cries, "Wer ist dies Weib, das mich ansieht? Ich will ihre Augen nicht auf mir haben" [Who is this woman who is looking at me? I will not have her eyes on me.] Upon first seeing him, Salome had noticed Jochanaan's black, fearsome eyes, commenting, "Seine Augen sind von allem das Schrecklichste. Sie sind wie die schwarzen Höhlen, wo die Drachen hausen!" [His eyes are the worst of all. They are like black caves where the dragons dwell!] Jochanaan's first impression of Salome is similar to her first impression of him when she notices his eyes. He remarks upon her eyes: "Warum sieht sie mich so an, mit ihren Goldaugen unter

den gleissenden Lidern? Ich weiss nicht, wer sie ist. Heisst sie gehn! Zu ihr will ich nicht sprechen.” [Why does she look at me like that, with her golden eyes glistening under their lids? I do not know who she is. Make her go! I will not speak to her.] In response, much in the way a child would excitedly present herself to a new friend, Salome introduces herself to Jochanaan by announcing her name and family background: “Ich bin Salome, die Tochter der Herodias, Prinzessin von Judäa.” [I am Salome, the daughter of Herodias, the Princess of Judea.] With her eager introduction, the audience sees Salome take an active role in the development of her relationship with Jochanaan. She is confident. The chromatic vocal line of Jochanaan that precedes her is replaced with A major stability as she announces her name.

45

Salome. 83 *Allegro non troppo*  
Ziemlich lebhaft.

Joch. Ich bin Sa - - - lo -  
fok. I am Sa - - - lo -

will ich nicht spre - - - chen.  
I would not speak. *pp*

Sal. me, die Tochter der He - ro - di - as, Prin - zes - - sin von Ju -  
mé, the daughter of He - ro - di - as, the Prin - cess of Ju -

*p espr.*

Sal. da - a. Jochanaan. Jokanaan.  
da - a.

Zu - rück, Toch - ter Ba - by - lons! Komm dem Er -  
Stand back! daugh - ter of Ba - by - lon! To the -

*ff*  
*dimin.*

Example 3.3: “Salome introduces herself to Jochanaan.” Scene III, rehearsal 83.

She assumes some of the power that can be derived from taking on the gaze, but she also invites Jochanaan to engage in a conversation with her. No longer afraid by Jochanaan’s loud declarations, Salome demonstrates her desire to abandon her childish behavior for something new.

### Awakening Desire

Despite Jochanaan’s refusal to introduce himself, Salome becomes increasingly enamored with the sound of his voice. As the music builds in anticipation, Salome erupts with “Jochanaan!





appreciation for Jochanaan's familiar features, Salome grows increasingly excited. Strauss outlines Salome's perceived connections between herself and Jochanaan. As she describes his hair, the familiar waltz-like passage of music that initially accompanies her description of the moon is used again to describe his hair.

Example 3.5: “Jochanaan’s hair.” Scene III, rehearsal 104.

She concludes by exclaiming to the prophet, “Lass mich ihn berühren, deinen Leib.” [Let me touch your body.] Jochanaan responds by berating Salome for speaking to him. Upset and outraged by his reaction, Salome condemns his white flesh and moves on to speak about the beauty of his hair. This pattern of flattery and rebuke continues as Salome searches for the aspect of Jochanaan that will offer her some form of satisfaction. Finally, Salome fixates on the prophet's scarlet mouth.

Example 3.6: “Jochanaan’s mouth.” Scene III, rehearsal 114.

She becomes so enthralled and flustered, as she attempts to express her passion for Jochanaan's mouth, that she does not notice Narraboth kill himself when he is no longer able to cope with her

professions of desire for Jochanaan. Jochanaan, also unaware of Narraboth's suicide, asks, "Wird dir nicht bange, Tochter die Herodias?" [Are you not afraid, daughter of Herodias?] He exclaims, "Sei verflucht, Tochter der blutschänderischen Mutter. Sei verflucht!" [Be accursed, daughter of the incestuous mother. Be accursed!] Despite Jochanaan's warnings and curses, Salome continues her pleas to kiss his mouth. Finally, Jochanaan says, "Ich will dich nicht ansehen. Du bist verflucht, Salome. Du bist verflucht. Du bist verflucht." [I will not look at you. You are accursed, Salome. You are accursed. You are accursed.] Jochanaan's refusal to look at Salome ends Scene III by introducing a different function of the gaze. Withholding the gaze can also contribute to altering power structures. Although Salome has gained agency through reaching this adolescent phase as she looks upon Jochanaan, his refusal to return the gaze (which could have symbolized a mutual, consensual attraction) represents a spiritual rejection of Salome. And this spiritual rejection propels Salome's search for fulfillment.

### **Mistaking Religion for Fulfillment**

Following her moment of realization when she proclaims her love for Jochanaan's body, Salome's infatuation with him grows rapidly and becomes all-consuming. Her fickle behavior—the ever-changing love/hate feelings—is characteristic of an adolescent's first experience with love or infatuation. It is clear from Salome's elaborate declarations that she is longing for and in search of some sort of fulfillment; this longing is induced by her recently discovered (and not fully understood) bodily desires. Jochanaan might not have any intention of awakening desire in Salome when he introduces sexual content during his condemnation of Herodias. His words, however, lead to Salome's recognition of her own sexuality, and it is feasible that Salome could

recognize Jochanaan as the cause of this newfound ecstasy. In her pursuit of Jochanaan, Salome perseveres in spite of his rebukes and hopes she can eventually secure the object of her desire. However, at the end of Scene III, it is unclear precisely what the object of her desire actually is. Salome is obviously searching for some vehicle to fulfillment, and in her quest she first mistakenly identifies Jochanaan as this source.

Perhaps she initially sees Jochanaan as the true object of desire because she is impressed by his moralistic preaching that condemns her mother. Maybe it is Jochanaan's courage to stand apart from the figures of power in her life that appeals to Salome. She might connect his imprisonment in the cistern with her own imprisonment in her mother's and step-father's court. By finally settling on his mouth as the physical feature on which she will fixate, Salome falls for the part of Jochanaan's body that can be linked most closely with the spiritual message he is delivering. Jochanaan has announced that he is a messenger sent to speak on God's behalf and to relay the coming of the Messiah, prophesying the establishment of Christianity. In addition, he refuses to hear Salome, but instructs her to use her own mouth to call to God for salvation.

In this symbolist narrative, Jochanaan's mouth can be interpreted as a symbol of salvation, or gateway to Christian faith.<sup>2</sup> As such, Salome's desire is not solely erotic; it is also spiritual. However, even if the ecstasy she has experienced, and wants more of, is spiritual and not related to self-awareness and sexual identity, Jochanaan—the spokesperson of organized, Christian religion—rejects her, condemns her, and washes his hands of her. Within the narrative, Salome would not know that Jochanaan is the pre-cursor to the Christian faith; however, Wilde's audience would understand the implications of basing this character on John the Baptist. Wilde's

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<sup>2</sup> Wilde joined prominent French Symbolist writers such as Stéphane Mallarmé and Maurice Maeterlinck when he wrote *Salomé*. As part of the French literary movement, Wilde endowed images or physical objects with added significance, creating another layer of meaning underneath the dialogue itself.

text reveals that spiritual ecstasy, ostensibly provided by Christianity, actually leaves much to be desired and is ultimately unfulfilling.

Literary scholar Petra Dierkes-Thrun argues that this theme was prominent in numerous writings of this period. She shows how Wilde and many of his contemporaries explored new methods to stimulate the senses through a work of art and experimented with other experiences of aesthetic beauty.<sup>3</sup> In Wilde's *Salomé* "metaphysical morality" is replaced with "a new secular physicality."<sup>4</sup> Jochanaan's spiritual rejection of Salome makes her an outsider and she is forced to find fulfillment elsewhere. Because organized religion fails to offer Salome the ecstatic, transcendent spiritual fulfillment she is seeking, she must turn toward other means—a secular kind of ecstasy that is grounded in corporeal, humanist ideologies. Wilde applies this new aesthetic means by including the Dance of the Seven Veils—a powerful expression of secular ecstasy that is made even more significant by the addition of Strauss's score.

### **Embodying a New Spirituality**

When Wilde's *Salomé* first appeared on stage in 1896, the character of Salome had been depicted in poetry, art, and literature for decades.<sup>5</sup> As Toni Bentley points out in *Sisters of Salome*, Wilde was the first to give Salome the stage, presenting the narrative from Salome's perspective as she conveys her own story for the audience.<sup>6</sup> With the theatre as a new venue for

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<sup>3</sup> Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 59.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>5</sup> For a fuller history of the figure of Salome in art, see Bram Dijkstra *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Wilde also strays from the biblical telling of the beheading of John the Baptist. In the gospels of Mark and John, it is Herodias who has the idea to ask for the head of John the Baptist on the silver charger, but Salome has her own motivation in Wilde's play.

Salome, Wilde recognized the stage as a site for a more well-rounded manifestation of the character—one that had many facets developed throughout the narrative, but retained the element of visual stimulation that had made the Salome figure so popular in the nineteenth century. A dancer herself (formerly with New York City Ballet), Bentley notes that Wilde also coined the title of Salome’s dance as *The Dance of the Seven Veils*.<sup>7</sup>

Arguably the most famous and widely recognized element from the Salome story (perhaps second only to the kiss in the final scene between Salome and the severed head of Jochanaan), the Dance of the Seven Veils is the ultimate manifestation of the largely visual function the character of Salome had held in the past. In the opera, the dance takes place in the fourth scene when Herod beckons for Salome. Salome breaks from her pining for Jochanaan to respond to Herod’s invitations to drink wine and eat fruit.<sup>8</sup> In addition to pursuing Jochanaan actively, Salome signifies her recently acquired empowerment in her behavior with Herod. Whereas Salome timidly expressed her discomfort with Herod’s glances earlier in the opera when she first appears on stage, she now confidently dismisses the sexually humiliating tasks her step-father requests. When he offers her wine, she claims she is not thirsty; when he asks her to bite into a piece of fruit, she states that she is not hungry. Salome has no intention of performing for the sexual gratification of Herod when he asks her to dance. She denies his request. Only after confirming with Herod that she will receive what she wants in exchange for her dance, she says, “Ich will für dich tanzen.” [I will dance for you.] Salome’s confidence raises the question of who wields the greater power in this interaction.

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<sup>7</sup> Toni Bentley, *Sisters of Salome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Herod’s fixation on Salome’s mouth and Salome’s own feelings about Jochanaan’s mouth create an interesting parallel. In many scholarly texts, Salome is painted as the victim and Herod the offender. In this moment, we recognize a small, but notable parallel between the two characters.

In the last two decades, *Salome* scholars have struggled with articulating Salome's agency in the Dance of the Seven Veils. Salome has been called both passive and active, and recognized as both victim and aggressor. Carolyn Abbate contends that Salome remains the object of the gaze and Lawrence Kramer argues that Salome loses power through the gaze.<sup>9</sup> Linda and Michael Hutcheon call Salome's dance a "Dionysian dance of the body," but argue it is fundamentally a means to an end.<sup>10</sup> Hutcheon and Hutcheon also assert that Salome's decision to be gazed upon is to have the upper hand because the choice represents control and therefore her dance is the best revenge.<sup>11</sup>

Another interpretation comes from Davinia Caddy. She explains that because neither Wilde nor Strauss left explicit instructions regarding the movements of the dance, a detailed account of the relationship between music and movement is impossible. She does suggest, however, that there is an inherent connection between the dancing body and the music that can provide the body with a voice.<sup>12</sup> Caddy presents a compelling argument that proposes that Salome's dance be recognized as having been conceived with "musical elasticity" in mind.<sup>13</sup> This elasticity is part of the appeal of Salome's dance<sup>14</sup> and corresponds to Dierkes-Thurn's

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<sup>9</sup> Carolyn Abbate, "Opera; or the Envoicing of Women," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 236-58. Lawrence Kramer, "Culture and Musical Hermeneutics," *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 2/3 (1990): 293.

<sup>10</sup> Linda and Michael Hutcheon, "Here's Lookin' at You, Kid': The Empowering Gaze in *Salome*," *Profession* (1998): 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>12</sup> She also specifies that this is dependent upon the music's capacity for "visual translation." Davinia Caddy, "Variations On the Dance of the Seven Veils," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17, no. 1 (2005): 44.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>14</sup> Nick Frankel warns against seeking and nailing down a concrete, deeper meaning to the Dance of the Seven veils, saying "those who go beneath do so at their own risk." Nick Frankel, "The Dance of Writing: Wilde's *Salome* as a Work of Contradiction," *Text* 10 (1997): 106.

argument that the dance's purpose is to encourage the pursuit of alternative sources of fulfillment. However, Strauss's setting is often criticized for having failed to capture an appropriate presentation of the Oriental themes expected in the dance. Norman Del Mar posits that representing Oriental sensuality came more easily to Russian and French composers than to German composers and argues that Strauss's setting is "unmistakably—even disconcertingly—Viennese."<sup>15</sup>

Strauss begins the dance with a new musical figure appearing in the oboes. The turning melody and the tone that the oboe produces conveys Strauss's attempt to convey an Oriental quality. An aggressive repeated eighth-note figure first played by violas at letter A characterizes Salome's determination and insistence. With solo flute at letter D, Strauss writes chromatic scale passages and flighty leaps to characterize Salome's exotic performance. These musical figures immediately establish the multi-layered nature of the Dance of the Seven Veils but give way to the Viennese element to which Del Mar refers: the waltz (six measures before Q), which dominates much of the material for the dance.

Although Strauss's critics have grounds for finding fault with his ostensibly Oriental setting, the dance is brimming with feverish eroticism and excitement. The final presto section of the dance features the rapid and conflicting expression of numerous themes, including, most prominently, the opera's opening "Salome" theme. The aggressive viola figure, the arpeggiations in the woodwinds, and the relentless ostinato pattern make the drive to the end of the dance a whirlwind of musical ideas. At L, trills played by solo piccolo, clarinets in A, and celeste make a sudden shift to a softer, sparser texture and a short pause creates a dramatic effect before the

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<sup>15</sup> Norman Del Mar, *Richard Strauss: A Critical Commentary on His Life and Works* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1962), 270.

orchestra plunges into the concluding gesture of the piece. The intensity of the dance, especially the final section, may represent not only Herod's escalating excitement but also Salome's own exhilaration. The Dance of the Seven Veils represents Salome's discovery of earthly pleasures through the ecstasy of performance.

## Conclusion

In Strauss's *Salome*, the Dance of the Seven Veils represents a major turning point in the opera, a place where Strauss validates Salome's agency through her repudiation of ecclesiastical spirituality. The musical realization of Salome's dance is the ultimate expression of the secular ecstasy that Dierkes-Thrun proposes as part of her modernist take on Wilde's play. Whether Salome is empowered by the control she has in her decision to be gazed upon or through the ambiguity of what truly lies beneath the final veil, the musical expression of the dance supports her own bodily expression of a secular spirituality. In her performance, Salome is active and in control of her own aesthetic experience, which is reflected in her musical language. Whereas Jochanaan's music is stable and orderly in the opening two scenes, as the opera progresses Jochanaan's initial horn hymn varies, causing him to lose some of his authority. Salome's music becomes more commanding, but even more importantly, her music is enticing, impressive, and seductive. Strauss's score reaffirms the choice for the secular over the spiritual. With Strauss's mesmerizing, fantastical score, Wilde's search for a new, exciting, earthly aesthetic is realized in Salome's second phase of self-awareness.



#### Chapter IV: “Man töte dieses Weib!”: Dangerous Sexuality

The conclusion of Strauss's *Salome* realizes the final stage of Salome's sexual identity. It includes the (in)famous decapitation of the prophet Jochanaan, features a lengthy final monologue as Salome sings to the severed head, and finishes with the murder of Salome, all in approximately twenty-eight minutes following the Dance of the Seven Veils. This stage marks her transition from innocent princess to sexual deviant. Salome's sexual expression is unrestrained and unmediated as she—on her own accord<sup>1</sup>—asks for the head of Jochanaan on a silver charger, and proceeds to sing to, and then kiss Jochanaan's mouth without reservation. This controversial conclusion has been a source of debate in both literary and musical scholarship. Since Wilde's *Salomé* premiere, literary scholars have attempted to articulate Wilde's thematic intentions through an examination of the final scene with a particular focus on the death of Salome. Among the most prominent interpretations, Salome has been understood as a mad woman afflicted by the exclusively female disease commonly referred to as hysteria. She has also been seen as a femme fatale, whose ultimate purpose is to bring destruction to the man with whom she is involved. In some cases in the early twentieth century, the conclusion makes Salome a reformed woman, who ostensibly finds salvation in death.

Although many of these literary sources focus exclusively on Wilde's text, musicological research often invokes these studies to arrive at similar conclusions. Despite the fact that

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<sup>1</sup> Although biblical renditions recognize Salome's mother as having influenced her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist, Wilde gives his Salomé the power to make this decision herself. The text also features Herodias praising Salomé for her decision, which she assumes is in her defense, but Salomé exclaims that her decision is not related to Jochanaan's relationship with Herodias.

critical-theory studies focus on Wilde's play and not Strauss's opera, many scholars acknowledge the play's suitability to be set to music. Literary scholar David Thomas writes that Wilde's text possesses a "verbal musicality."<sup>2</sup> In this stage of Salome's transformation, Strauss's Wagnerian style of writing embodies this verbal musicality. In a musical fashion similar to that of the "Liebestod," Salome's monologue is expressed with slow harmonic pacing and lush, grandiose gestures in the orchestra, which seem to transcend the appalling events taking place.

This chapter will negotiate the common interpretations of Salome's characterization through a discussion of the medical-cultural discourse of hysteria and will also examine the musical implications of Strauss's score in relation to these established critical theories. Through an analysis of perceptions regarding female sexuality at the turn-of-the-century, I propose that Strauss's rendering seeks to represent Salome as a woman who, after her transformative coming-of-age experience, is in control of her own identity. Through Salome's pursuit of her own desires, Strauss reveals the power of an anthropocentric, secular aestheticism that usurps ecclesiastical spirituality.

### **Female Sexuality: Hysteria and Madness**

Following her dance, Salome enters the third stage of her sexual awareness when she announces what she wants for a reward for her performance. As Salome sweetly [süss] describes the silver charger, the orchestral texture turns sparse. Six measures after rehearsal 249, the mood turns eerie as the E-flat clarinet plays a trill and the piccolo and flute sound the musical figure of a major third and descending fourth, which first arises at rehearsal 76 when Salome comments on

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<sup>2</sup> David Thomas, "The 'Strange Music' of Salome: Oscar Wilde's Rhetoric of Verbal Musicality," *Mosaic* 33, no.1 (2000): 24.

Jochanaan “Er ist schrecklich” [He is awful.] Herod interrupts her, and just before she answers, Violin I joins the piccolo and flute in the musical figure (two measures after rehearsal 254) that signals her desire for Jochanaan. Salome finally answers, smiling [lächelnd), “Den Kopf des Jochanaan” [The Head of Jochanaan.] The E major harmony that is first established in relation to Jochanaan’s mouth is evoked in this phrase. This short flourish completes the E major harmony suggested by the piccolo, flute, and violin and reveals that Salome will finally have Jochanaan’s mouth to kiss.

kl. Föte.

1. gr. Fl.

2. Hob.

engl. Horn.

Heckelphon.

2. A-Clar.

Basscl.(B.)

1. 2. Fag.

Contrafag.

3. 4. Trp.(C.)

1. 2. 3. 4. Pos.

Tuba.

Pauken.

Celesta.

2. Harfen (unisono).

Herodes.

Was istes? das du haben müchtest, Sa-lome? Den Kopf des Jo-cha-na-an. (führt auf.) Nein, nein.

254 doppelt so langsam. (mit Dämpfern.) ritard. a tempo Schnell.

(1. Pult.) Viol. I.

(die übrigen) Viol. II.

Br.

(1. u. 5. Pult.) Celli.

(2. 3. 4. Pult.) C.B.

1. Harfe

2. Harfe

Example 4.1: “Salome asks for Jochanaan’s head.” Scene IV, four measures after rehearsal

254.

At this point in the opera, Salome’s infatuation turns perverse. She is no longer content only to kiss his lips; she must have his head on a silver charger. She becomes a stronger character,

dominating the dialogue on stage and demonstrating her command over the orchestra. Salome reacts to her mother's approval of the request. In her lower register Salome shouts, "Ich achte nicht auf die Stimme meiner Mutter. Zu meiner eignen Lust will ich dem kopf des Jochanaan in einer Silberschüssel haben. Du hast einen Eid geschworen, Herodes. Du hast einen Eid geschworen, vergiss das nicht!" [I do not follow my mother's voice. It is for my own pleasure that I ask for the head of Jochanaan on a silver charger. You have sworn an oath, Herod. You have sworn an oath, do not forget it!]

Salome. *doppelt so langsam.*  
 Ich ach-te  
 I do not  
 im-mer schlech-ten Rat. Ach-te nicht auf sie.  
 giving e-vil coun-sel. Do not heed her words.  
 nicht auf die Stimme meiner Mut-ter. Zu meiner eig-nen Lust will ich den  
 heed the voice of my mo-ther. 'Tis for mine own pleasure that I ask the  
 Kopf des Jo-cha-na-an in ei-ner Sil-berschüssel ha-ben. Du hast ei-nen  
 head of Jo-ka-na-an in a sil-ver charger, Te-trarch. Re-member the

Example 4.2: "Salome commands the orchestra." Scene IV, three measures before rehearsal 256.

As Herod insists she choose another prize, Salome continues to confirm her power over Herod and the orchestra in steady rhythms, e.g. at two measures before rehearsal 261, rehearsal 279,

and often in her lower register, as in two measures before rehearsal 271 and two measures after rehearsal 284. Herod implores her to change her mind: “Salome, ich beschwöre dich.” As he calls her name, the rhythmic figure that Narraboth first sings on “Salome” as he gazes upon her, returns. The figure that first established Salome as the object of the gaze is repurposed to illustrate Salome’s assumption of the powerful position.

Herod. *Etwas ruhiger* 265

sprich nicht zu mir! Sa - lo - me, ich be -  
 speak not to me! Sa - lo - me, I be -

schwöre dich. Sei nicht trot - zig! Sieh, ich ha - be dich.  
 swear thee be not stub - born! Come, have I not

*dim. p espress. espress. pp marc. espress. dolce*

H. 15520

Example 4.3: “Salome’s name reallocated.” Scene IV, rehearsal 265.

Salome repeats herself for the final time at two measures before rehearsal 298 when she cries “Gib mir den Kopf des Jochanaan!” [Give me the head of Jochanaan!] before Herod succumbs to her wish at two measures before rehearsal 299.

These desires and convictions have earned Salome many titles, such as “everyone’s favourite fin-de-siècle dragon-lady,”<sup>3</sup> “an effeminate man,”<sup>4</sup> and “unwholesome, unclean, hysterical” woman.<sup>5</sup> The term hysterical relates to the disease, which, beginning in the late

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 271.

<sup>4</sup> Siegfried Mattl, “Metapolitics and the Avant-Garde,” *The Musical Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 191.

<sup>5</sup> Linda and Michael Hutcheon, “Here’s Lookin’ at You, Kid: The Empowering Gaze in ‘Salome,’” *Profession* (1998): 19.

nineteenth century, was believed to have afflicted mostly women. When Wilde wrote *Salomé* in 1891 and when Strauss set his opera in 1905, female hysteria was a popular and expanding concept in medical professional circles, especially with the revolutionary work of Sigmund Freud, who was developing his theories of psychoanalysis. While female hysteria was being explored mainly in the health and medical field, the prominent practice of calling Salome hysterical in contemporary reviews of the opera suggest that the general public was aware of these studies and medical discussions.

In his 1903 edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Austrian M.D. Richard von Krafft-Ebing includes his discussion of hysteria in a chapter titled “Special Pathology.”<sup>6</sup> His test cases and examples feature women of varying ages, and he provides analyses of hysterical women who, until their (often sudden) illness, were considered moral, trustworthy people. Krafft-Ebing explains that in cases of hysteria, the “sexual sphere is often abnormally excited,” and this excitement may be related to the menstrual cycle.<sup>7</sup> Offenses that Krafft-Ebing deems examples of hysteric behavior include, but are not limited to, insatiable sexual impulses, smearing the body with filthy substances, experiencing delusions of jealousy, and hallucinations of coitus.<sup>8</sup> It is noteworthy that most of Krafft-Ebing’s examples feature the symptom of a heightened sexual appetite, but he also includes a lack of sexual drive as indicative of hysteria. He writes, “Occasionally frigidity may occur, with an absence of lustful feeling. This is usually due to genital anesthesia.”<sup>9</sup> Krafft-Ebing’s book also presents a section on necrophilia: a horrible,

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<sup>6</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: with especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: a Clinical-Forensic Study* (Burbank, California: Bloat Books, 1999), 5. The 1903 edition is his 12th and final edition.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 411.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

monstrous sexual indulgence, in which a person experiences a morbid and erotic attraction to corpses.<sup>10</sup> Although Krafft-Ebing includes necrophilia in his section on pathologized sexuality, he writes that in reported cases of necrophilia, the mental health of the offender was not examined and therefore necrophilia cannot conclusively be classified as a mental illness.<sup>11</sup> Although he does not include necrophilia as a symptom of female hysteria, the two are often linked in discourse on *Salome* when Salome's sexual impulses fuel her desire to kiss the head of Jochanaan.

In *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), Freud and Josef Breuer are more specific about the connection between hysteria and the menstrual cycle. Referring to “pubertal hysteria,” Freud and Breuer discuss the physical maturing of girls and the different ways in which girls respond to these changes.<sup>12</sup> Whereas some girls avoid exploring these physical and emotional changes (considering them “irreconcilable with their moral substance”), other girls (“typically peasant or working-class”) accept it in the way boys do.<sup>13</sup> In their discussion of puberty, the girls who accept puberty do not demonstrate any inhibitions in their sexual expression and are relatively comfortable with their development. Despite the possibility that between 1880 and ca. 1900 the public would have been troubled by a young girl's ready acceptance of her pubescence, Freud and Breuer actually argue that these girls are sexually well-adjusted, and that it is the girls who suppress and ignore their sexuality that develop neurosis leading to female hysteria.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 512.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Freud also explores the hysteria that is sometimes a result of the female's suppression of her sexuality and sexual abstinence. Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2004), 246.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 246.



Unlike *Psychopathia Sexualis* and *Studies on Hysteria*, Havelock Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1903) does not include an examination of hysteria in his discussion of female sexuality.<sup>15</sup> The first half of his section titled "The Sexual Impulse in Women" seeks to prove that female sexual desires are not as weak as has been previously suggested in female sexuality discourses.<sup>16</sup> The latter portion, however, does draw a connection between the female mind and the womb. Ellis writes that often women's mental capacity is limited, and only when their sexual emotions are activated do they "spring into life."<sup>17</sup> Ellis continues to say that the sexual-emotional relationship affects women more so than men: this connection "unmans the man," but makes the woman "truly herself" for the first time.<sup>18</sup>

### **Salome: Hysterical Femme Fatale**

These major contributions to the study of human sexuality were all written around the turn-of-the-century and present a common belief in the existence of female-specific mental illness related to sexuality. These works, among others, inform our understanding of how the contemporary audience may have perceived the character of Salome. For example, the huge range of symptoms of female hysteria that Krafft-Ebing articulates makes an actual diagnosis difficult to achieve. At the very least, Salome's actions in the final scene fit Krafft-Ebing's description of an abnormal excitement in the sexual sphere. Her abnormal desire to kiss the severed head is particularly jarring because the Salome from the first scene, who likens herself to

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<sup>15</sup> Although he was also a physician, Havelock Ellis had a different background from Freud and Breuer. He was British and was also a social reformer.

<sup>16</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1902), 173.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

the cool, chaste moon, is so tame. Salome's connection to the moon also plays into Krafft-Ebing's theory that intermittent female hysteria may correlate with a woman's menstrual cycle.<sup>19</sup> Salome's professions of desire for Jochanaan's skin, hair, and mouth, which last for significant periods of time in the opera, as well as in the text alone, could be interpreted as the insatiable sexual impulses that are symptomatic of hysteria. However, it is Salome's specific request for Jochanaan's head that reveals she is no longer satisfied with asking Jochanaan if she may touch and kiss him. She assumes a predatory position and graduates to the status of femme fatale: a woman whose ultimate goal is to bring about the destruction of the man with whom she is involved.

Lawrence Kramer identifies this moment as the point when Salome is recognized as not only a sexual being, but also as a monster. The most troubling concern about Salome is not her incestuous striptease, but rather her "style of speech, her promiscuous weaving together of erotic similes in the service of her desires."<sup>20</sup> When the executioner presents the head of Jochanaan on a silver charger to Salome, her plan to kiss his lips turns violent. She sings to the severed head: "Wohl, ich werde ihn jetzt küssen! Ich will mit meinen Zähnen hineinbeissen, wie man in eine reife Frucht beissen mag" [Well, I will now taste your kisses. These teeth of mine are waiting to bite deeply, as hungry teeth desire to bite ripened fruit.] Not only is Salome assuming a position of sexual power over Jochanaan, but she also uses hunting, preying language to describe how she will kiss him. She is almost cannibalistic in her approach; the imagery of biting teeth is inhuman

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<sup>19</sup> Sander L. Gilman also discusses how hysteria may have been manipulated in the opera as a way to connect the disease to Jewish people—that they had a greater risk to develop hysteria. See Sander L. Gilman, "Strauss, the Pervert, and the Avant Garde Opera of the Fin de Siècle," in "Special Issue on Austria," *New German Critique* 43 (Winter 1988): 35-68.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Kramer, "Culture and Musical Hermeneutics," *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 2/3 (1990): 280.

—almost vampiric.<sup>21</sup> Further supporting Salome’s destructive role as femme fatale, her devouring of Jochanaan’s lips is also viewed as her ultimate act of revenge against the prophet who refused to entertain her advances or even her friendship.

Taken on its own, the reading of Salome as a pathological hysteric woman or a femme fatale may be a limited or shallow understanding of the work as a whole. If Salome’s character is reduced to a woman acting out of hysteria and madness, so sexually-charged and destructive that she commits a type of Freudian castration, then the conclusion of the opera—Salome’s death, which Wilde added to the biblical narrative—is a warning to women who choose to pursue their own sexual desires. The case study of Salome suggests that female sexuality, particularly that of females who seek to engage in sexual relationships that involve some level of autonomy and fulfillment, will inevitably lead to disaster. This reading of Salome was the most common following the opera’s premiere.<sup>22</sup>

### **Finding Salvation in Salome’s Murder**

Another interpretation of Salome’s sexuality translated her passion and hysteria into a spiritual, religious experience. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a new kind of religious reform involving biblical scholarship was emerging in Europe. Some critics had grown weary of the farcical bedroom comedies that dominated the European stages in the nineteenth century, and were ready for serious dramas that addressed a “higher” or “historical” criticism that challenged

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<sup>21</sup> Elaine Showalter also discusses the obsession with female vampires in literature. Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, (New York: Viking, 1990), 108.

<sup>22</sup> Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 56-82.

issues in biblical scholarship.<sup>23</sup> In both cultural and medical discussions, hysteric episodes in women were occasionally recognized as religious experiences, wherein women were transported to the spiritual realm to encounter God and included in discussions of mysticism.<sup>24</sup>

In “The Taste of Love: Salome’s Transfiguration,” Anne Seshardi compiles a long list of contemporary *Salome* reviewers who commend Strauss for his musical setting of Jochanaan. Strauss is praised for writing Jochanaan’s part as musically stable, and, as a result, the figure is viewed as a “rock of salvation” for the remainder of the opera. He is even called “one of the most outstanding characters of opera” of the time.<sup>25</sup> Along with the praise for Jochanaan’s character, the murder of both Jochanaan and Salome is justified in much contemporary criticism of the opera. Seshardi writes that Strauss’s *Salome* has a particular redemptive quality about it.<sup>26</sup> By embracing the love of Jochanaan, Salome invests in the Christian doctrine that Jochanaan puts forth. Salome’s passion for religious reform is so intense, in fact, that when her desire to unite in Christendom with Jochanaan is denied, she must have him killed. Only in her own death can she actually join Jochanaan and achieve salvation. This reading that proposes that Salome is saved<sup>27</sup>—that her murder is not a violent end to a woman’s life, but the beginning of a spiritual one—is problematic. It ignores the turn-of-the-century cultural implications of

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<sup>23</sup> Katherine Brown Downey, *Perverse Midrash: Oscar Wilde, André Gide, and Censorship of Biblical Drama* (London: Continuum, 2004), 42.

<sup>24</sup> Cristina Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria: Neurosis, Mysticism, and Gender in European Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Anne L. Seshadri, “The Taste of Love: Salome’s Transfiguration,” *Women and Music* 24 (2006): 24-44.

<sup>26</sup> Seshardi also presents an excellent discussion regarding how this redemption can be interpreted as Salome rejecting her Jewishness by loving Jochanaan.

<sup>27</sup> Seshardi also speculates that this interpretation led to later productions that included props and set pieces that enhanced this salvation interpretation of the opera.

Salome's behavior. In recent decades, the conclusion of the opera has received very different interpretations, suggesting that Salome's actions are not motivated by a quest for salvation.

### **Salome, the New Woman**

The readings mentioned above offer polarizing characterizations of Salome: crazed, evil woman, and crazed, saved convert. Although both arguments use female hysteria to strengthen their case, their conclusions approach opposing extremes concerning female sexuality. *Femme fatale* Salome is sexually depraved; she is killed for having pursued sexual gratification.

Reformed Salome must abandon her personal identity to conform to Jochanaan's expectations of her, and she must die in order to achieve salvation. But in a persuasive examination of hysteria, literary critic Elaine Showalter demonstrates how the medical-cultural obsession with female hysteria was a backlash to the "New Woman" movement at the turn of the century.<sup>28</sup>

The New Woman emerged as a strong female who sought, among other things, self-fulfillment, primarily in the social sphere. Now loosely understood as the earliest icon of the feminist movement,<sup>29</sup> the New Woman held new aspirations beyond her existing status. Showalter argues that the emergence of medical discourse surrounding female hysteria coincided with the New Woman phenomenon, and posits that doctors believed hysteria was detrimentally linked to these new aspirations—that somehow the New Woman's search for her fulfillment was symptomatic of a disease. However, Showalter discusses Freud's study on hysteria to provide context for the ostensibly female disease. Freud contended that girls who eventually became

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<sup>28</sup> Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, 40.

<sup>29</sup> Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester, UK.: Manchester University Press, 1997), 4.

afflicted by hysteria were “likely to be lively, gifted, and full of intellectual interests, women of powerful intellect, sharp, and critical common sense.”<sup>30</sup> Showalter’s argument is effective and a compelling perspective with which to read Salome. Without the label of femme fatale or religious convert, Salome can assume the more appropriate title of the New Woman. She is progressive, and independent, and she chooses the worldly, aesthetic powers of humanism over the spiritual realm.

### **Salome’s Musical Humanism**

In the final phase of her sexual transformation, Strauss explores the unnerving ramifications of Salome’s request, but also provides another layer of meaning through his melodious and colorful setting of Salome’s final monologue. Strauss supplies much musical material to characterize Salome’s sexually depraved behavior in this final phase. Increased chromaticism leading to bitonality, aggressive percussion, and wide spacing in the orchestration represent her dangerous sexuality. Strauss includes this musical material in the final monologue to reflect Salome’s psychological drama as she alternates between praising and condemning Jochanaan. However, Strauss also includes large sections representing sustained euphoria with lush orchestration and sweeping vocal phrases. The dissonant—almost atonal—passages in the monologue are repeatedly replaced with Salome’s C-sharp harmony. For example, having just received the head of Jochanaan, Salome sings over heavily accented articulations in the strings, frantic scale passages in the cello, and displaced triplets in the woodwinds, proclaiming that Jochanaan did not want her to kiss him. Over a C-sharp pedal, a diminished seventh chord on B

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<sup>30</sup> Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, 40.

sounds as Salome announces “Wohl, ich werde ihn jetzt küssen” [Well, I will now kiss it.] This culminates in a shift to C-sharp minor (Salome’s home key) beginning two measures after rehearsal 315.

The image shows a musical score for three voices (soprano, alto, and tenor) and piano accompaniment. The score is in German and English. The key signature is C-sharp minor, indicated by two sharps (F# and C#) and a 'c# minor' label at the bottom. The tempo is marked 'piu lento' and 'Etwas breiter'. The score includes lyrics in German and English. The rehearsal mark 315 is indicated. The score is for measures 313-317.

Rehearsal 315: Wohl, ich werde ihn jetzt küssen. (Well, I will now kiss it.)

Rehearsal 316: Wohl, ich werde ihn jetzt küssen. (Well, I will now kiss it.)

Rehearsal 317: Wohl, ich werde ihn jetzt küssen. (Well, I will now kiss it.)

Example 4.4: “Salome’s turning point.” Scene IV, five measures before rehearsal 315.

Despite Strauss’s clear manifestation of Salome’s dangerous sexuality in numerous dissonant passages, his practice of smoothing over these disjunct sections with C-sharp harmony speaks to Salome’s ability to transcend the reality of the situation. The argument that Salome should be interpreted solely as a femme fatale is perhaps the easiest to cast off when one examines the presence of C-sharp major at the end of the opera. The dramatic climax of the opera takes place when Salome kisses the head of Jochanaan. Instead of harmonic clashes, booming brass, violent percussion, and shrill singing, Strauss writes the most exuberant, moving music for the entire opera, in the key of C-sharp major. At rehearsal 333, Salome begins slowly

working herself into a trance-like state. As she remembers Jochanaan's better characteristics, violins play the oscillating third figure, which has moved into Salome's newfound euphoric key of C-sharp major. This figure becomes increasingly prominent as the opera reaches its conclusion.

Example 4.5: "Salome's new consonant motive." Scene IV, rehearsal 333.

As she proceeds to describe Jochanaan's voice, a violin solo emerges out of the orchestra to complement her vocal line. In Salome's monologue, even the judgmental aspects of Jochanaan are forgotten as she remembers his musical voice. The falling-fourth motive that appears as a prelude to much of Jochanaan's music (such as at the start of Scene III) appears in the flutes, oboes, and English horn. From this point, Salome's music seems to overpower the odd reality of the situation. The orchestra supports her, invoking the waltz-like elements established earlier in the opera when Salome describes the moon and in her Dance of the Seven Veils. Here, these elements are fleshed out, giving Salome the time and musical material to sing an authentic love aria. Woodwinds evoke pastoral imagery as they color Salome's vocal lines. She re-appropriates Jochanaan's body from an untouchable prophet to a new, possibly anthropocentric medium for fulfillment. Strauss picks up on Wilde's verbal musicality and establishes a musical, aesthetic form that replaces Jochanaan's organized religion. As the orchestra sounds his musical figures



(such as seven measures after rehearsal 338) underneath Salome's vocal line, it is clear that her new offering overpowers Jochanaan's. The euphoric, transcendental musical score drives the final scene. Although Strauss avoids clear tonal resolutions in his larger sections, C-sharp major remains in the foreground, taking precedence over dissonant passages.

However, in the final moments of the opera, just before rehearsal 361, there is a sudden change in Salome's transcendent C-sharp major affirmation. The passage's cadence includes a very dissonant chord built on an A dominant seventh chord and an F-sharp major chord. This moment of bitonality is a dramatic signal that something is wrong. It is the least prepared dissonance in the entire opera and takes place at a significant moment: the final cadential gesture of Salome's monologue.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the opera Salome. It includes vocal lines for Salome and Herod, and piano accompaniment. The score is in C-sharp major. The tempo markings are 'ritard.' and 'molto largo sehr breit'. The key signature is C-sharp major. The score includes the following lyrics: 'dei - nen Mund. thy mouth. Man tö - te die-ses at once that Go, kill'. The score is numbered 361 and 208. The piano part includes the following markings: 'dim.', 'ritard.', 'piu mosso', and 'f'.

Example 4.6: “Dissonant conclusion.” Scene IV, one measure before rehearsal 361.

This jarring moment serves as a warning to Salome. The source of the warning is unclear but may come from an omniscient source. Although it is sounded in the orchestra during Salome's monologue, it does not reflect her state of mind. The unidentified agent that delivers

the warning does not cause Salome to stop or renounce her behavior, but it does send Herod into action. Herod calls for Salome to be killed and C minor takes over for a bombastic close to the opera. Although Salome's final monologue is redeeming for her—she is presented as both a powerful and warm woman despite transgressions into psychological instability—this dramatic shift abruptly ends Salome's pursuit of earthly spirituality.

## Conclusion

The conclusion of *Salome* is complicated. The final scene presents Salome as a sex maniac, a cruel woman who has reached an almost demonic state of being as she calls for the head of Jochanaan. But when Salome obtains the object of her desire—when she realizes a temporal, bodily longing—she achieves an earthly spirituality. Salome becomes a relatable character. Her expressive, lyrical vocal lines express the worldly means by which one can achieve fulfillment: music can be the secular aesthetic form to reach this goal. Even Jochanaan is portrayed in a warmer light in the final scene. After his death, Salome becomes responsible for remembering him. With this newfound agency, she chooses to remember him as better than he was. But, just as quickly as she achieves this earthly spirituality, she is promptly killed at her step-father's order.

It is difficult to negotiate the overarching themes in Strauss's perplexing work. Perhaps one can apply Ernest Newman's argument that Strauss was often ahead of his time, and only years after his works debuted can they be fully appreciated. In this instance, Strauss sets Wilde's story about a young woman who becomes a sexually depraved monster, but in addition to this narrative, Strauss humanizes Salome in the final scene of the opera. What Wilde tried to create with Salome's verbal musicality, Strauss realizes by showing that Salome's infatuation with

Jochanaan has not just turned into revenge. Although Strauss may have felt compelled to appease the turn-of-the-century audience, by punishing this “New Woman,” he nevertheless puts forth progressive ideas regarding female desire in the final monologue, causing the audience to consider the inclusion of female autonomy and desire in the social sphere.

## Chapter V: Salome's Sexual Transformation on Screen

Strauss's *Salome* has enjoyed a colorful performance history since its intended Berlin premiere was canceled. Its controversial depiction of religious figures and disturbing sexual content has made the production difficult to mount. In its complicated history, *Salome* has been met equally with contention and admiration across the globe. The three productions by Götz Friedrich (1974),<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Flimm (2004),<sup>2</sup> and David McVicar (2008)<sup>3</sup> have been praised for their interpretations of this dramatic work. All feature a Salome who, to varying degrees, performs a clear transition from innocent teen to brazen sexual creature. In addition, these stagings shy away from the conventional "Orientalized Other" portrayal of Salome in exchange for an independent, autonomous Salome with whom the audience can sympathize in spite of her necrophiliac sexual desire for a severed head. Within this common framework, these productions explore different overarching themes of the opera, and thus feature strongly different interpretations of the opera's conclusion. Friedrich's *Salome* constructs a Salome whose love for Jochanaan seems sincere and justified; Flimm's staging emphasizes Salome's fascination with her own sexual power and her curiosity to test its limits; and McVicar's production experiments with power structures and gives Salome new motivation to pursue Jochanaan. They take advantage of the wealth of material that Wilde and Strauss provide to create three different

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<sup>1</sup> *Salome* (1974), directed by Götz Friedrich, conducted by Karl Böhm (Vienna Philharmonic), with Teresa Stratas, Bernd Weikl. Deutsche Grammophon DVD, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> This examination uses the 2008 Met HD Broadcast DVD version, which is a revival of the 2004 staging and includes Karita Mattila reprising her role. *Salome* (2008), directed by Jürgen Flimm, conducted by Patrick Summers (Metropolitan Opera Orchestra), with Karita Mattila, Juha Uusitalo. Sony Classics DVD, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> *Salome* (2008), produced by Jürgen Flimm, conducted by Philippe Jordan (Orchestra of the Royal Opera House), with Nadja Michael, Michael Volle. Opus Arte DVD, 2008.

interpretations; however, all three productions incorporate the essential element of Salome's sexual transformation.

### **Götz Friedrich's *Salome***

In his staged-for-film production of *Salome*,<sup>4</sup> Friedrich directs Teresa Stratas (Salome) and Bernd Weikl (Jochanaan) in a relatively conservative production that is carried by the vocal power of its lead singers. Friedrich creates a film that is driven by the relationship between Salome and the moon. As the film begins, he immediately establishes the connection by revealing a full moon in soft focus as Salome's clarinet motive sounds. As Narraboth sings about Salome's beauty, the camera pans out across the stage to reveal him staring off in the direction of Salome. Within the first minute of the opera, Friedrich establishes the moon as a central image in the characterization of Salome, and utilizes camera angles to manipulate the gaze of the audience and highlight the gazes within the opera. The camera also contributes to the characterization of Jochanaan. As Jochanaan's booming voice emanates from the cistern, interrupting Narraboth's admiration and the Page's worry, the camera pans out to reveal the soldiers. Previously at ease, upon hearing Jochanaan the soldiers stand (almost at attention) to look at the cistern. Despite the fact that Jochanaan is a prisoner, his voice manages to command respect from the soldiers. As Jochanaan's declaration continues, townspeople gather at the gate to the palace to hear him speak. Michal Grover-Friedlander, in her chapter "Otello's One Voice," describes the means by which a film director must be able to demonstrate visually the human

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<sup>4</sup> In her seminal work *Opera on Screen*, Marcia J. Citron discusses some of the earliest productions of operas staged for film in her chapter "A Stroll Through History." Using the Unitel-produced film version of *La Bohème* (1967), Citron demonstrates that many early filmed productions of opera lacked significant visual intrigue. Friedrich's *Salome* is another example of an early attempt to capture opera on film, and although the camera work is occasionally static or uninspiring, he manages to create a complex and engaging Salome. See Marcia J. Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 50-59.

voice. She explains that the “means by which *voice is envisaged*” is an integral factor in determining how the character is perceived.<sup>5</sup> Grover-Friedlander cites examples of the visual stimulations in Verdi’s *Otello* that enhance the presence of the voice. In the case of Friedrich’s *Salome*, it is Jochanaan’s lack of a physical manifestation of his voice that makes him such an authority. Conversely, his voice alone manages to intrigue the other characters on stage.

In contrast, Salome’s first appearance on stage is shown through a tighter frame, focused on her body against a tall pillar, but wide enough to include Narraboth and the Page looking on from behind a neighboring pillar. Friedrich’s efforts to connect Salome to the moon are further strengthened by her appearance. Salome’s costume is evocative of the moon: it is a silvery-mauve color and her hair is wrapped up into a bejeweled, decorated cap of the same shade. She appears against the silver-grey pillars of the palace and the light of the moon washes over her. Her make-up is muted; she is pale and white in the moonlight. She acknowledges the moon and sings to it directly as she comments on the sweet air. As she compares the moon to a silver flower and remarks upon its chastity, the camera assumes a low-angle shot behind Salome and closes in on the back of her decorated cap and the moon. Although the camera does not adopt Salome’s point of view, the close-up of Salome’s lunar-like cap and the moon itself illustrate that as Salome is singing to and describing the moon, she is also describing herself.

This characterization that compares Salome to the moon moves beyond the characterization of Orientalized Other (as seen in earlier Salome portrayals, such as that of Maud Allen, who wore a flowing and beaded outfit) and instead gives her an ethereal quality. Salome’s appearance, paired with the textual associations with the moon, does not make her seem exotic

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<sup>5</sup> Michal Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University press, 2005): 55.

and Oriental, but rather “out of this world.” The off-white apparel and overtly stated connections between Salome and the chaste moon characterize her as a clean, pure virgin. The relationship between Salome and the moon also broadens to involve Jochanaan when she first hears him speak. Still with her back to the camera, as she extends her arms to the moon, she hears Jochanaan’s voice. Seemingly paralyzed, Salome remains still, eyes fixated on the moon, as she listens to Jochanaan’s lyrical phrases. When Jochanaan’s phrase ends, she abruptly shifts her gaze from the moon to Jochanaan’s cistern.

The moon, whose associations she had previously reserved for herself, is now also connected to Jochanaan. Friedrich’s close-ups, linking Salome, the moon, and finally, Jochanaan, create an intimate atmosphere for Salome’s self-reflection. These visual cues also generate motivation for Salome to meet and speak with Jochanaan before she even verbalizes this comparison between Jochanaan and the moon. Salome’s determination to meet Jochanaan prompts her to stomp around the stage, moving quickly in bouts of frustration as she is denied access to the prophet. The medium close-up shows her heaving chest as she spits out her demands. To get her way, she employs a friendlier demeanor with Narraboth. She kneels down beside him and coyly asks for his help, and Narraboth quickly sends for Jochanaan.

When Jochanaan emerges from the cistern, he appears to be strong, if a bit stunned, despite having been locked up for an unspecified amount of time. The downstage lights are dimmed and Jochanaan is backlit as he squints and shields his eyes. A solitary spotlight shines down on Jochanaan, casting shadows over his face. As his proclamations continue, the camera cuts to a wider angle showing Jochanaan’s entire body. His gestures are slow and direct—almost

ceremonial. Gaining confidence, Salome approaches Jochanaan and sings about his skin and hair. She does not seem overly discouraged by Jochanaan's harsh words for her advances.

At her moment of sexual realization, when she announces that Jochanaan has awakened her desire, she remains somewhat reserved in her physical expression of this newfound sexuality. However, Friedrich empowers Salome as the gazer as she looks upon Jochanaan while professing her feelings. The camera cuts to a shot of Jochanaan's lower body, specifically his leg, including his upper thigh. His disheveled clothing is arranged so as to appear as if there is a slit in his garment. Not only is part of his body exposed, but he is exposed in a way that is typically reserved for women. Salome reaches for his leg but only when she asks to kiss his mouth does she touch him for a prolonged period of time. At his feet, she clutches his leg as he disparages and curses her. Distraught, Salome uses the stage, pacing back and forth as she seeks to convey her love for Jochanaan, but also to exemplify her anger as he rejects each advance. Jochanaan's rejections fuel her anger, and the second stage of her sexual identity develops when she dances for Herod to secure the object of her desire.

Even in Stratas' Dance of the Seven Veils, she begins in a reserved manner and avoids succumbing to the third, dangerous phase of her sexuality. This portrayal of Salome's dance begins mildly: women appear in beaded headpieces and dance around her. While Salome remains primarily in the foreground, the women's dance in the background is far more provocative than hers. With little fluidity in her hips and chest, her dance begins rather conservatively, as if she is tentative about her newfound sexual awareness. And, the opening of her dance emphasizes her uncorrupted virtue rather than her sexual nature. Salome's motions are largely circular. Whenever she twirls around, a hand-held camera captures her actions, as if



someone at the decadent party is filming the event. It is only toward the end of the dance, when she removes her full, dark hair from her cap and begins to gyrate against the walls and roll on the floor, that she overtly expresses her sexuality. It is in her dance that she understands and realizes her second stage of sexual development.

Friedrich illustrates Salome's third phase of sexual awareness by breaking the relationship between Salome and the moon. When Salome receives the head of Jochanaan on the silver charger, she lifts it up to the moon as she announces her intention to kiss his mouth. Instead of illuminating her face in a wash of light, the moonlight is obstructed. A burning torch on the stage-left wall becomes the main source of light, flickering and casting shadows on Salome's face. Eventually the moonlight is practically imperceptible as her face is pressed to the severed head and her connection with the chaste, white moon is obliterated. The final disconnect between Salome and the moon takes place when Herod calls for his servants to hide the moon and stars. Immediately after he calls these orders, Salome moves herself up, away from the severed head, exclaiming "Ah! Now I have kissed your mouth at last, Jochanaan!" As she repeatedly sings these words in the direction of the moon, Herod orders his servants to kill her. The last image is that of Salome's hand reaching for Jochanaan's head on the charger, shimmering in the moonlight.

The role of the moon in the characterization of Salome cannot be overstated in Friedrich's version. From the initial image of the unfocused moon, to the moonlight reflecting off the silver charger as the final credits begin to roll, Friedrich endows the moon with the ability to reflect Salome's identity, and even predict her ultimate demise. Friedrich's production is relatively

conservative in its portrayal of *Salome*'s more controversial elements, but his depiction of Salome is insightful and creative.

### **Jürgen Flimm's *Salome*<sup>6</sup>**

The Metropolitan Opera's 2004 season included Jürgen Flimm's staging of *Salome*, which featured Karita Mattila in the title role and Juha Uusitalo as Jochanaan. The immense success of the production garnered such enthusiasm that the production was revived for the 2008 Metropolitan HD Broadcasts, and was subsequently distributed on DVD. The opera is set roughly between WWI and WWII in the 1920s or 1930s, but fuses this time period with American modernism. The set features a large staircase at the back of the stage, decorated with a mosaic of red glass pieces and a circular platform of transparent glass in the center. The platform has a spiral staircase that leads down into the stage, where Herod's party takes place, and on stage left Jochanaan's cistern is topped with a tall scaffolding structure that has the capacity to hoist Jochanaan up from the cistern by means of an elevator.

In Flimm's staging, Mattila creates a dynamic Salome, but one whose transition from innocent teen to sexual deviant is more gradual. The subtleties of Mattila's performance are as effective in conveying her character as the larger, more obvious landmarks in her sexual development. Flimm's *Salome* is a significantly different concept from Friedrich's. Whereas Friedrich's Salome escaped her step-father's party and is relieved to be away from the decadent

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<sup>6</sup> Unlike Friedrich's production, Flimm's is not staged-for-film. The opera was produced for the Metropolitan Opera audience, but was broadcast live and recorded. Instead of employing exclusively pre-determined camera techniques, the Met Broadcast uses multiple cameras located throughout the venue, which are called live by Barbara Willis Sweete, TV director. Although the nature of live performance does not easily lend itself to refined camerawork, the videographers involved in the Met Broadcast anticipate the action on stage and demonstrate creativity and an in-depth knowledge of the show.

scene, Flimm's Salome is having a party of her own as soon as the curtain rises.<sup>7</sup> In a somewhat unusual practice, Salome appears on stage immediately. She is in a glossy silver dress—a cross between a long gown and a negligée. While Narraboth looks on, the camera assumes a low-angle shot of Salome while she holds a wine glass over her head, turning in a slow circle. The low angle and raised platform beneath her give the impression that, at least from Narraboth's perspective, Salome is on a pedestal. Salome breaks out of her circling motion and goes down the spiral staircase to join the party.

When Salome re-appears on stage, emerging from the spiral staircase beneath the stage, she is youthful and energetic. With her bouncy blonde curls, Salome paces the stage light on her feet and somewhat aimlessly. She seems very young—perhaps pre-pubescent. Her girlish excitement is evident in her reaction to hearing Jochanaan's voice for the first time. She prances across the stage quickly on the balls of her feet, but her innocence is questionable as she manipulates Narraboth, asking him to bring Jochanaan up from the cistern. She strokes Narraboth's arms, and when he sits down on the lip of the stage, Salome sits above him on the glass riser, wrapping her feet around his neck. When he finally agrees to allow Salome to meet the prophet, she excitedly pours champagne into his mouth and on his face in celebration. While these are arguably not the actions of a sexually unaware, innocent girl, Salome's conduct does not seem fundamentally motivated by sex.

As she drinks champagne and rubs up against the men on stage, Mattila maintains facial and bodily expressions that suggest Salome is merely imitating behavior she has witnessed in the past, presumably at many other parties like the one taking place this night. At most, Salome's

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<sup>7</sup> With Salome on stage at the start of the opera, the first scene of Flimm's production is reminiscent of the opening party scene of *La Traviata*, in which Violetta is hosting a lavish party in her Paris salon.

sexualized gestures are motivated by her fascination with the control she seems to have over the other characters on stage. While she waits for Jochanaan to be raised from the cistern, she sits on the raised glass platform, swinging her legs as she waits to attach a face to the deprecatory voice. Frequent close-ups of Salome's face reveal her inquisitive looks as she excitedly waits to see the prophet.

Jochanaan is hoisted up from the cistern in a lift that resembles a cage. Flimm's Jochanaan is a powerful character and is respected by the other figures on stage. After gaining his ground and taking a few long, deep breaths, Jochanaan stands and almost immediately assumes a strong and commanding presence. His voice is unshaken despite his awful living conditions and his message is strong as ever. Assuming a wide stance, Jochanaan proselytizes with a forceful voice and gestures up toward the sky as he declares the coming of the son of man. Salome is enthralled with him and seeks his approval. With Jochanaan in the foreground, extending his arms up to the heavens, Salome appears in the background, imitating his gestures that seek to welcome the son of man. Increasingly excited by his mysterious rhetoric and his dominating stance, Salome begins to describe some of Jochanaan's features that she finds most compelling. As she describes the whiteness of his skin, she touches her own face and it is difficult to decipher whether she is completely seduced by his looks, or whether they torture her. Either way, when Salome announces that she is in love with Jochanaan's body and enters into the second phase of her sexual development, Mattila's expressions demonstrate that Salome is absolutely beside herself, overwhelmed by his powerful presence and mysterious convictions.

In her second phase, Salome advances to a level of sexual awareness. Whereas her sexual gestures seemed uninformed and imitative in the first two scenes, Salome's pursuit of Jochanaan

becomes increasingly calculated. At the same time Mattila retains some of the more childish features of her character, reminding the audience of Salome's age and her sexual inexperience. After Jochanaan's first rejection of her advances, Salome compares him to a scorpion: she raises her arms, elbows pointing to the sky, and looks enraged as she convulses, imitating a scorpion. Demonstrating her fickle attitude, she changes focus and begins to fixate on Jochanaan's black hair. At first she leans back onto the glass platform, swaying her hips side to side, but then playfully skips along a wooden plank in front of the cistern, waving her arms back and forth and then ruffling her own hair. The camera alternates between close-ups of Salome's expressive face and broader, long shots that include the other characters who are staring at the princess's abrupt motions. Jochanaan's reactions are potent and aggressive. Persistently, Salome finds another reason to praise Jochanaan: his lips. She moves toward Jochanaan and extends one of her legs onto the scaffolding, lunging toward him and licking her lips as she describes how his lips are redder than the pomegranate. Jochanaan grows increasingly violent. He takes her wrists as she reaches for him and throws her to the ground. The camera assumes a low-angle shot to reveal a powerful Jochanaan standing over Salome, who has collapsed on the floor.

When Jochanaan is put back in the cistern, Salome climbs atop the scaffolding and negotiates with Herod about the terms of her dance. In her higher position, the camera work focuses on high-angle shots that reinforce Salome's height over the other characters. When Salome asks Herod if he will really, truly give her what she wants, she slides down into the splits, still on the scaffolding, before climbing down to whisper "you have sworn an oath, Tetrach" in Herod's ear.

Flimm's staging of the Dance of the Seven Veils features Mattila in a Marlene Dietrich-inspired tuxedo. The androgynous costume is paired with a more dominating, masculine Salome. The reference to Dietrich reinforces the German-American theme that runs through the production. The only sign of a veil is the red scarf that she shimmies along the red staircase at the back of the stage. With graceful movements, but hardly an actual dance, Salome teases the Tetrach with the scarf, with a sheepish smile. Exposing her shoulders, Salome takes off her blazer and uses it in a bullfighter maneuver with one of the soldiers on all fours before climbing onto the solidier and riding him, mimicking a bullfighter controlling a bull. While occasionally taking swigs of champagne, Salome takes off the remaining layers of her power suit. With their teeth, two male party attendants pull down her pants to reveal a black corset, black satin shorts, and black knee-highs. Her movements become more dance-like, but she incorporates increasingly sexual gestures. She performs a pole dance on the scaffolding above Jochanaan's cistern and gives a lap dance to Herod, in which he occasionally thrusts in time with the music, picking her up out of his chair. In the final moments of the dance, Salome removes the rest of her clothing and throws her arms up in the air as she exposes her body.<sup>8</sup> She is quickly covered with a black robe, playfully makes her way to sit cross-legged next to Herod. With a smile on her face, she innocently announces that in exchange for her dance, she wants the head of Jochanaan on a silver charger, signifying her transition into the final stage of her sexual awareness.

Mattila, whose voice is remarkably youthful, begins to experiment with vocal color as she emphasizes her transformation to sexual heathen. Strauss includes many more lower-register phrases in this third and final section of the opera, and Mattila digs into these low notes,

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<sup>8</sup> The DVD footage of the Met broadcast does not include this footage. It cuts to Herod's reaction.

producing chesty, guttural exclamations about Jochanaan and his head. When Jochanaan's head is presented, it ascends from the cistern in the cage-like elevator contraption and is suspended in the air, with extra lighting from beneath to illuminate the severed head. Mattila delivers a stunning performance of the final monologue, incorporating much variation in the registral shifts that Strauss provides. The animation in her eyes from the first scene is replaced with a more focused energy, with which her movements are slower and drawn out. The relationship between Salome and Jochanaan seems especially intimate because they are essentially alone on stage. In a unique staging decision, the party has dispersed and Herod and Herodias have passed out on the glass platform. In this more private setting, Salome licks her lips as she comments on Jochanaan's inability to speak and passionately kisses his mouth. The camera focuses entirely on Salome's face and the head of Jochanaan, showing every detail of agonizing pleasure exhibited on Mattila's face.

The most disturbing part of the final monologue takes place when Salome, on the floor, after having aggressively kissed the bloody head of Jochanaan, rolls away from the head, exposing the blood all over her mouth and face. She is exasperated from the kiss and with her chest heaving, she takes a few long, audible breaths as she lies upside-down with her head hanging on the lip of the stage and again states "I have kissed your mouth, Jochanaan." Then, as she explains the mystery of death to Jochanaan's head, Herod wakes up and calls for her death. Mattila exhibits, for a moment, the Salome from the first scene as she backs away from Herod; but, just before the curtain falls and the final accented brass passage sounds, she faces the audience, puts her hands on the neck of her robe, and throws her head back in the air: a defiant gesture signifying that she has no regrets.

Flimm's *Salome* presents a narrative that balances the many complexities of the character of Salome. Her expression of sexuality early on in the opera is related to her own fascination with the power she has over others, but this transforms itself into expressions that are motivated by her own desires. Mattila's Salome is captivating and endearing, and she manages to remain likeable and relatable even as she kisses a decapitated head. In Flimm's production, Jochanaan is a strong figure who, in addition to rejecting her verbally, is physically violent with Salome and is a far less sympathetic character. Her final monologue, as well as her acceptance of her death, demonstrate her unashamed attitude regarding her sexuality and its expression. This production shows Salome's sexual transformation on a smaller scale, but nevertheless conveys the significance of Salome's discovery of bodily autonomy.

### **David McVicar's *Salome***

The Salome in David McVicar's 2008 Royal Opera House staging is somewhat similar to Friedrich's interpretation. However, McVicar's striking portrayal of Jochanaan and Salome's interactions with him contribute to the director's humanist take on the opera. McVicar passes over some of the usual devices that are used for character development, including Salome's connection to the moon, and the casting choices reflect specific effects he wishes to create, especially in the case of Jochanaan. McVicar's staging gives Salome's motivation to love Jochanaan another dimension.

McVicar's setting is in what appears to be the servants' quarters and kitchen. Above the main set, Herod's party is taking place, and the audience can only see the party attendants from the knees down. By establishing these visual levels, McVicar creates obvious class distinctions.



The upper-class partygoers are physically above the soldiers and servants. Jochanaan's cistern is simply a hole in the floor on stage right. The moon is not discernible for most of the performance because the action takes place on this underground level. This creates an obstacle for this production's Salome, Nadja Michael, who must convey her innocence without the obvious connection to the chaste moon. McVicar and Michael achieve the connection through other visual and gestural cues. When Salome appears, she is wearing a silver, glistening gown with a matching barrette in her hair. As she escapes the party, she sits down on the staircase, hugging her knees to her chest and rocking slightly. The camera focuses on stage left, where the staircase is located. Salome appears nervous and clearly does not wish to interact with any guests at the party upstairs; however, the absence of the servants and soldiers in the camera's view suggests that Salome also has very little interest in interacting with the grown-ups on the level below the party.

When Salome hears Jochanaan's voice for the first time, she is intrigued but shy. She circles the cistern, assessing his conditions, and wants to meet him. It is Salome's relationship with Jochanaan that McVicar cultivates and emphasizes for his humanist take on the opera. When Salome appears on stage, she is perceived as a stable character, if a bit nervous. Jochanaan's first appearance is treated entirely differently from the Friedrich and Flimm productions, where he is cast as a commanding, noble figure. Jochanaan (sung by Michael Volle) has a light voice, completely unlike the boisterous baritone of Juha Uusitalo from the 2008 Met production. McVicar's Jochanaan appears mentally and physically unstable from the moment he emerges from the cistern. Whereas Friedrich's soldiers respected Jochanaan, one of McVicar's soldiers kicks Jochanaan as he is coming out of the cistern. This characterization of Jochanaan is

unique among *Salome* productions. This is due, in part, to McVicar's setting. The production takes place in Nazi Germany, and the critical treatment of Jochanaan is particularly appropriate when one considers how Jochanaan is typically represented as a heroic, holy figure. In McVicar's production, Jochanaan—the supposed holy figure who is proclaiming Christ's arrival—is depicted as a weak and untrustworthy character, and in his interactions with Salome, he is perceived as less stable.

In one of few moments of strength from Jochanaan, he is depicted as arrogant and self-righteous. In a manner similar to how an evangelist preacher might cast out an evil spirit from a compromised member of a church congregation, Jochanaan places his hand on Salome's head as he exclaims that there is only one who can help her. At first, the camera includes the entire stage, where the soldiers and servants look on in fear but closes in on Salome and Jochanaan as he grows increasingly aggressive. Under his hand, she swerves from side to side, entranced by the ceremony in which she is a reluctant participant. He abandons the procedure to speak about the son of man, and again his proclamations are presented as ramblings as he teeters on stage and gestures wildly. His condemnation of Salome leaves her hurt, curled up in the fetal position on stage. A close-up of her body reveals she is visibly shaken from her altercation with Jochanaan. With Herod's offer, however, she gains confidence as she realizes that a dance will ensure she gets Jochanaan in the end.

In McVicar's *Dance of the Seven Veils*, Salome passes through seven doorways, with very

little actual dancing.<sup>9</sup> In the DVD's accompanying documentary, McVicar explains his motivation for this staging, saying that Salome attempts to make the dance for Herod beneficial to her as well: "Instead of seven veils as a private dance just for him, it goes through seven rooms and its seven levels of self-discovery for her."

As the party fades away, Salome and Herod pass through a doorway but remain on stage as the lights go out with the exception of one major spotlight that illuminates Salome's actions, and also a trace of light that extends from the doorway. Through the second doorway, a lone doll sitting on a chair is revealed. Salome straddles the chair and throws the doll at Herod—a somewhat blatant symbolic gesture of Herod taking control of Salome's innocence. He sits down on the chair and beckons her to sit on his lap; when she obliges, he strokes her legs while she plays with her doll. In the third room, a veil flows from the top of a mirror; Salome dances with it and puts it over her head as if donning a bridal veil. In the fourth room, a party dress appears on a mannequin—perhaps an invitation extended to Salome for her to participate in the decadent party taking place on the upper level of the stage. A digital backdrop appears showing a zipper on a similar (if not the same) dress as on the mannequin being unzipped. Herod then unzips the dress Salome is wearing, and she turns to the mannequin to put on the party dress. She runs through to the fifth room where Jochanaan's cistern is located and she twirls and dances in her party dress. Here, she and Herod engage in a waltz as a chandelier projects onto the

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<sup>9</sup> The seven doors are evocative of the seven doors used in Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, in which the character Judith insists that all the doors in her new husband's home be opened. The first two doorways reveal a torture chamber and an extensive armory. The following three doorways reveal a collection of riches, a beautiful garden, and a window with a breath-taking view of Bluebeard's kingdom. Although he urges his wife to stop opening the doors, she continues. When the sixth door is opened, a shadow is cast over the kingdom, and the final door reveals Bluebeard's first three wives who are destined to remain behind the seventh door. The opera concludes as Judith is forced to pass through the seventh doorway to join the other wives, and once again, Bluebeard is left alone. Similarly, various truths are revealed as Salome passes through each of the seven doorways in her Dance of the Seven Veils.

backdrop behind them. Through the next doorway, moving into the sixth room, a light bulb is displayed on the back screen. Herod removes Salome's dress. A sink is located on stage left. Salome runs to it, splashing water on her face. She attempts to wash herself with only her hands to pool the water and splash it onto her body. Salome reluctantly follows Herod through the next doorway into the seventh and final room. This room is offstage.

The audience cannot see the seventh room, but the implication through the other six rooms is that the dance would end with sex. Herod emerges from the room, back into full light, shouting "wonderful!" while Salome trails behind him, stumbling around and dazed. Although there is no explicit reference that reveals that Salome has, in fact, had sex with Herod, even the suggestion that they have generates sympathy in the audience. While she may have participated in the act, it is clear, especially seeing her in her frazzled state afterward, that it was not truly consensual. Salome's harried state dissolves as she remembers her reward. Her first request for the head of Jochanaan is somewhat quiet and tentative, but as she gains confidence, articulating again that she wants the head of Jochanaan on a silver charger, she transitions strongly into the third phase of sexual deviance.

McVicar creates a chilling effect for Salome's final phase. Herodias strips down the executioner and he proceeds, nude, down the cistern to retrieve Jochanaan's head. He emerges covered in blood, holding Jochanaan's head. Still wearing only her slip, Salome hugs the executioner, takes the head, and lays it on the silver platter. She sings to the head and promptly picks it up, arrogantly swinging it around stage. The camera includes the entire stage, as Salome prances from stage right to stage left. When Herod has seen enough, he calls for the moon to be covered, and Salome ignores him. She rolls around on the stage, squirming as she kisses

Jochanaan's head, nibbles on his ear, and comments on the bitter taste of love. She is virtually drenched in blood at this point, holding the head in her lap and rocking back and forth. For her final lines she stands with the head, and holding onto it by his hair, the head hangs down by her side: her final moments of contemplation are inward, rather than directed at Jochanaan. With Herod's orders to kill her, the executioner who decapitated Jochanaan grabs Salome, breaks her neck, and drops her to the ground. Her death, although not as proud as Mattila's Salome, manages to leave the audience feeling like Salome has discovered something. Compared with Jochanaan's ramblings and vulgar murder, Salome's death does not diminish her discovery of a worldly alternative to Jochanaan's religion.

In the documentary accompanying the production's DVD, McVicar and Michael discuss Salome's transition and how Salome finds more than sexual gratification in Jochanaan. Her interactions with him did lead her to make her own discoveries:

McVicar: "It's almost as if she feels as if she might have met her soul mate."

Michael: "I agree."

McVicar: "Good! Genau. We are in agreement. [...] We agree that she's not a horny bitch from the beginning. [...] For Herod she will be. She's much more interested in trying to understand the spirituality inside John rather than being instantly turned on by him. And we're in agreement that she's really listening to his words."

McVicar and Michael touch on Salome's sympathetic qualities. In addition to appearing more stable and trustworthy than Jochanaan throughout her first two transformative phases, she is able to find the good in Jochanaan, despite his deranged and condescending manner. Salome has power over Jochanaan. She is strong and self-affirming. McVicar's portrayal of Salome's and Jochanaan's spiritual relationship reveals that Salome is the more dependable and moral of the two.

## Conclusion

These three productions all exemplify how Salome's transformation can play into various interpretations of the score and text. Salome can transition from virginal teen to sexual fiend, as in Friedrich's production. Her change can take place on a smaller scale to convey a coming-of-age story where Salome's sexual identity is driven by her own desires, as in Flimm's production. Or, as shown in McVicar's interpretation, Salome can be transformed into a humanist—a dramatic representation that suggests that the power of artistic and musical aestheticism can usurp the power of traditional spirituality. In all three productions, Salome exhibits specific sympathetic qualities that are represented in Strauss's score, and the portrayal of her relationship with Jochanaan plays into a modernist ideology that values an earthly and temporal spirituality over organized religion.

## Chapter VI: Epilogue

*Salome*'s widespread appeal lies in the narrative itself. Its biblical subject matter, sexually explicit themes, well-developed characters, blend of the erotic with the violent, and complex yet nuanced overall narrative foster the potential for multiple interpretations. The intricacies of *Salome* and its susceptibility to starkly contrasting renderings have allowed for numerous projects that focus on one or more elements of the work. In the productions discussed in Chapter V, the presentation of Salome's sexual transformation varies, but there is a clear progression in her sexual identity from beginning to end. Although many productions in the past have portrayed Salome exclusively as a sexual heathen whose death is considered a just punishment for such despicable behavior, productions like those of Friedrich, Flimm, and McVicar demonstrate a change in the conception of *Salome*: she is presented as a rounded, dynamic character. The next wave of *Salome* productions and interpretations may be difficult to predict, but many productions of the last decade indicate that the breadth and density of Strauss's score is fertile ground for diverse readings that move beyond Wilde's standard narrative.

One of these innovative *Salome* productions took place in Lithuania in 2006. In regard to his production with the Lithuanian National Opera, American director David Alden writes that *Salome* audiences should be surprised in some capacity each time they attend a new production. One of his surprises includes a new take on the Dance of the Seven Veils, wherein Herod is the performer instead of Salome.<sup>1</sup> Stefan Herheim's Salzburg production of April 2011 features a

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<sup>1</sup> "Salome-Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre," Lietuvos nacionalis operos ir baletu teatras, <http://www.opera.lt/en/repertoire/opera/salome> (accessed March 7, 2012).

twist on the opera's conclusion. Instead of dying by Herod's orders, Salome expires by escaping into the mouth of a huge, life-size structure of Jochanaan's head.<sup>2</sup> In 2013, the Canadian Opera Company will remount Atom Egoyan's 1996 multi-media production of *Salome*. At the time, Egoyan's use of technology and video in an operatic production was deemed extremely innovative and novel. The 2013 remount is expected to be more than a revival of the 1996 production and will incorporate newer technologies to propel *Salome* into the twenty-first century.<sup>3</sup>

Broadening the scope of *Salome* has also expanded beyond the operatic genre. Strauss's work in general has made significant inroads into popular culture, and thus has also received recognition in mainstream culture. For example, of the Richard Strauss works that are included in the film soundtracks catalogued in the Internet Movie Database (IMDb),<sup>4</sup> "Also Sprach Zarathustra, Op.30," Strauss's well-known sixth tone poem, dominates the list after 1968, when it was featured in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Before *2001*, however, *Salome* was the more popular choice for film soundtracks. Excerpts from *Salome*, which typically include the Dance of the Seven Veils, appear in three feature-length films: *Sunset Blvd.* (1950), *The Man Between* (1953),<sup>5</sup> and *Black Widow* (1954). Although "Also Sprach Zarathustra" now forms the lion's share of Strauss's soundtrack entries, *Salome* entries are the second most common. Other

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<sup>2</sup> Micaela K. Baranello, review of *Richard Strauss: Salome*, by Salzburger Osterfestspiele, Großes Festspielhaus, *Opera Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (spring-summer 2011): 331-37.

<sup>3</sup> Melissa Leong, "Atom Egoyan, Robert Carsen Return to the Canadian Opera Company," *National Post (Toronto)*, January 18, 2012. <http://arts.nationalpost.com/2012/01/18/atom-egoyan-robert-carsen-return-to-the-canadian-opera-company/> (accessed March 1, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> "IMDb-Richard Strauss," Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0006309/maindetails> (accessed February 5, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> *The Man Between* is a thriller set in post-WWII Berlin. In the final scene of the movie, a staged production of *Salome*, featuring Ljuba Welitsch, serves as the backdrop to the conclusion of the film.



prominent films that have used *Salome* score excerpts include *Mascara* (1987),<sup>6</sup> *A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries* (1998), and *The Omen* (2006). The IMDb list of films that feature Strauss's music is by no means an all-encompassing, complete catalogue, but it does offer insight into the varied uses of Strauss's works. *Der Rosenkavalier* is the only other work that has a significant number of entries in the catalogue, but *Salome* is more prominent. The popularity of "Also Sprach Zarathustra" in film soundtracks is unsurprising, considering the initial fanfare's associations with the far-reaching galaxy, an adventure or quest, but the uses of excerpts from *Salome* in major films are more diverse.

In addition to its inclusion in major films, Strauss's score has been sampled in smaller, lesser-known productions. In 2010, Christian Zagler's *Salome in Low Land* (2006)<sup>7</sup> was presented at the *Vienna Independent Shorts* International Short Film Festival for the program "Animated Music in Austria 1937-2008."<sup>8</sup> This ten-minute and forty-two-second opera parody is described as "a delightful concoction that joins the classic world of opera with the contemporary world of retro 8-bit video games."<sup>9</sup> Zagler's film is a condensed version of the opera conveyed through the 8-bit digital medium that emulates a typical arcade game from the 1980s. Although the film is comical and offers a satirical depiction of the Salome narrative, it manages to convey the most important elements of the opera through the pixilated images. Zagler recognizes the connection between Salome and the moon, making the moon a female character resembling

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<sup>6</sup> For an examination of *Mascara*, see Carolyn Abbate "Opera, or the Envoicing of Women," in *Musicology and Difference*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 225–58.

<sup>7</sup> It premiered at the Rotterdam Film Festival 21/01/2006 and has since been featured in over ten festivals.

<sup>8</sup> "Animated Music in Austria 1937–2008," Vienna Independent Shorts, <http://www.viennashorts.com/en/festival/geschichte/vis-2010/programm-2010/rhythm/animated-music.html> (accessed March 1, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> "Christian Zagler," Vienna Independent Shorts, <http://www.viennashorts.com/en/service/artists-database/artists-z/christian-zagler.html> (accessed March 1, 2012).

Salome in the sky. As the film begins, the opening figure from the Dance of the Seven Veils sounds and the story begins. Text appears on the screen: “Though still innocent, Salomé is a true daughter of her day, heiress to its passions and its cruelties.”<sup>10</sup> As Salome sings, the voice of the powerful soprano Birgit Nilsson emanates from the round, animated figure. Zagler highlights Salomé’s moment of sexual realization as the figure rolls through the air in her excitement over Jochanaan. Zagler also highlights the dark eroticism of Salomé’s final stage by showing a black screen as she announces that she has kissed Jochanaan’s mouth. Even this animated short film, intended to be a parody, demonstrates Salomé’s sexual development in the film’s characterization of the cartoon character.

Zagler briefly summarizes the film on his YouTube page: “Richard Strauss’ opera heroine Salomé set into an 80’s arcade game world where she urges for love, blood and satisfaction. HiFi meets LoFi.”<sup>11</sup> To be sure, Zagler’s short film is an oversimplification of Wilde’s narrative, yet his splices of Strauss’s score are surprisingly effective and emphasize three clear phases in Salome’s journey to self-awareness. These film examples confirm *Salome*’s ability to transcend the boundaries of the operatic genre. The use of Strauss’s score has also had real-world implications in the performance sphere of female figure skating.

In 1996, a familiar narrative about a young woman endeavoring to understand her sexual identity surfaced during the World Figure Skating Championships. American figure skater Michelle Kwan performed the free-skate routine “Dance of the Seven Veils” at the age of fifteen. Kwan placed first with the routine that featured an abridged version of Strauss’s score from the

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<sup>10</sup> “Animated Music in Austria 1937–2008,” Vienna Independent Shorts, <http://www.viennashorts.com/en/festival/geschichte/vis-2010/programm-2010/rhythm/animated-music.html> (accessed March 1, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Christian Zagler, “Salome in Low Land” (2006), youtube.com, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RaDT5vbKXc> (accessed March 1, 2012).

opera.<sup>12</sup> Kwan's win led to recognition on the international stage. However the "provocative"<sup>13</sup> nature of her performance, where she wore "a purple dress sprinkled with gold-colored sparkles spilling onto her shoulders and back,"<sup>14</sup> was not well-received when she first performed the routine at competitions earlier in the season. She was criticized for being a fifteen-year old who decided "that heavy makeup and Salome's dance of the seven veils [would] make her appear sufficiently adult before the judges."<sup>15</sup> But following her win, Kwan received critical acclaim that marked a newfound maturity in her artistic development. Philip Hersh, *Chicago Tribune* Olympic sports writer, writes:

When Kwan unveiled her free skate last fall at Skate America, portraying the lascivious Salome, it sparked debate about whether a 15-year-old who carries a teddy bear backpack was trying too hard to be something she wasn't. In barely five months, Kwan stunningly has matured into the role. Michelle Kwan on ice is becoming a seductive combination.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, Kwan's performance is relatively tame, especially when compared to some of the staged performances of *Salome*. Although her routine is certainly heartfelt and expressive, it is hardly provocative. Furthermore, the critics of Kwan's routine, perhaps unaware that Salome is intended to be a young, adolescent girl, specifically state or imply that the fifteen-year-old Kwan is too young to play the character of Salome. Whether intended by Kwan and her choreographer

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<sup>12</sup> Her routine also features Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov's Caucasian Sketches Op.10, "In a Village" and Miklos Rozsa's "Salome's Dance" from the 1961 film *King of Kings*.

<sup>13</sup> Randy Harvey, "Kwan Spectacularly Steals This Moment," *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1996, [http://articles.latimes.com/1996-03-24/sports/sp-50800\\_1\\_world-championship](http://articles.latimes.com/1996-03-24/sports/sp-50800_1_world-championship) (accessed March 6, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Kwan Wins a Duel That Lights up the Ice the American Skater Was Dazzling in Taking the World Title. Her Chinese Rival Was Nothing Less., *Inquirer (Philadelphia)*, March 25, 1996, [http://articles.philly.com/1996-03-25/sports/25635686\\_1\\_triple-toe-jump-long-program-chen-lu](http://articles.philly.com/1996-03-25/sports/25635686_1_triple-toe-jump-long-program-chen-lu) (accessed March 7, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Jere Longman, "Figure Skating; Presumed Skating," *New York Times*, January 17, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/01/17/sports/figure-skating-presumed-skating-juggling-marriage-a-comeback-and-the-law.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> (accessed March 6, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Philip Hersh, "Kwan, 15, Blossoms Into World Champion," *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1996, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-03-24/sports/9603240129\\_1\\_michelle-kwan-toe-loop-lu-chen](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-03-24/sports/9603240129_1_michelle-kwan-toe-loop-lu-chen) (accessed March 6, 2012).

or not, given Kwan's age when she performed the routine and the resulting criticism, her performance became a case of life imitating art. Through her performance of the Dance of the Seven Veils, Kwan is a real-life example of a young girl expressing her sexuality. Regardless of how provocative this choreography and performance may or may not be, expressions of adolescent female sexuality continue to cause discomfort among the viewing public almost a century after *Salome*'s premiere.

This viewpoint is explored in Abigail M. Feder's article "'A Radiant Smile from the Lovely Lady:' Overdetermined Femininity in 'Ladies' Figure Skating." Feder explains the restrictive boundaries of female behavior deemed acceptable by the figure skating audience. It is difficult, she argues, for women to balance the "societally contradictory roles of woman and athlete."<sup>17</sup> The over-feminization of female figure skaters was a solution to solve the problem of the "masculine" connotations of playing sports and being an athlete.<sup>18</sup> With this in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that female figure skaters have often been drawn to female opera characters who successfully perform their femininity as well as demonstrate their strength.<sup>19</sup> Ellyn Kestnbaum writes about this phenomenon in relation to Kwan's Dance of the Seven Veils routine in her book *Culture on Ice: Figure Skating & Cultural Meaning*.<sup>20</sup> Kestnbaum prefaces her discussion of the Seven Veils routine with quotations from Kwan after she placed fourth in the 1995 World Championships with a different routine. Although her technical scores were very

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<sup>17</sup> Abigail M. Feder, "'A Radiant Smile from the Lovely Lady:' Overdetermined Femininity in 'Ladies' Figure Skating," *The Drama Review* 38, no.1 (Spring, 1994): 63.

<sup>18</sup> Feder writes that unless a female figure skater was overtly feminine, she would be detrimental to the reputation of the sport.

<sup>19</sup> In 2011 "Opera on Ice!" premiered in Verona, Italy. The show features famous figure skaters performing to well-known operas.

<sup>20</sup> Ellyn Kestnbaum, *Culture On Ice: Figure Skating & Cultural Meaning* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan, 2003).

high, Kwan's presentation scores were much lower and cost her a place on the podium. After her loss, Kwan endeavored to assume a more mature persona. In both practice and performance, Kwan began wearing stage make-up and abandoned her familiar ponytail for a "sophisticated bun" to prepare for the 1996 championship.<sup>21</sup> When Kwan's Seven Veils routine was the subject of much media attention, Kwan's coach, Frank Carroll, remarked on Kwan's change for the 1996 season: "The judges [at the 1995 Worlds] were looking for the ladies' champion of the world, not the girls' champion of the world."<sup>22</sup> Kestnbaum states that Kwan was considered mature in the sport as well as in the media because she was willing to reveal herself as a sexual being; however, she argues that Kwan's maturity was actually conveyed through the routine's technical difficulty and Kwan's "increased speed, intricate footwork, better poise, posture, and precision in her positions."<sup>23</sup> While Kwan was demonstrating her technical and performative abilities to be considered for a world title, both her critics and supporters were discussing her physical appearance and young age instead of recognizing her talents.

Kwan's experience provides another potential avenue for *Salome* scholarship: the added consideration of Salome's age compounded with her sex. Further analysis of Salome and her sexual development could include an examination of the character in light of the "Lolita effect." In *Chasing Lolita: How Popular Culture Corrupted Nabokov's Little Girl All Over Again*, Graham Vickers expresses the reasons why society finds the idea of a Lolita figure so intriguing. He writes that the appeal of Lolita is that she triggers both pleasurable and haunting feelings for

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<sup>21</sup> Ellyn Kestnbaum, *Culture On Ice: Figure Skating & Cultural Meaning* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan, 2003), 49.

<sup>22</sup> As quoted by Ellyn Kestnbaum, *Culture On Ice*, 49.

<sup>23</sup> Kestnbaum, *Culture On Ice*, 52.

those who encounter her, whether in Vladimir Nabokov's 1958 book, a film<sup>24</sup> or musical adaptation, or a popular-culture reference.<sup>25</sup> *Lolita* and *Salome* share certain characteristics and seem to have similar seductive powers over the older male characters in their respective narratives. In studies such as Vickers' and M. Gigi Durham's *The Lolita Effect: The Media Sexualization of Young Girls and What We Can Do About It*,<sup>26</sup> adolescent female over-sexualization is the primary concern. Conversely, *Salome* scholarship could also benefit from a perspective that recognizes that adolescents and also children do indeed possess sexuality and a sense of sexual-self. It is equally important to acknowledge that children are sexual beings while simultaneously understanding the implications of sexualizing them.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

Salome, as a character and as a story, will continue to infiltrate various artistic genres as well as spawn new interpretations and approaches to live performances. It is perhaps Strauss's music, at least in part, that has allowed for so many different portrayals of Salome. The inclusion of the score in feature films as well as smaller, independent film projects speaks to the widespread appeal of *Salome*. The strikingly similar critical response to Salome's sexual development and to Michelle Kwan's shift in her professional image is indicative of the social and cultural challenges that young women continue to face a century after *Salome*'s premiere.

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<sup>24</sup> In 1968, Stanley Kubrick directed the controversial film *Lolita*, starring James Mason and Shelley Winters.

<sup>25</sup> Graham Vickers, *Chasing Lolita: How Popular Culture Corrupted Nabokov's Little Girl All Over Again* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2008), 225.

<sup>26</sup> M. Gigi Durham, *The Lolita Effect: the Media Sexualization of Young Girls and What We Can Do About It* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Hardcover, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Such an analysis must, of course, balance this discussion of healthy child and youth sexuality with acknowledgement of the need to protect children, one of society's most vulnerable groups, from becoming victims of child pornography, incest, and pedophilia.

The scope of Strauss's astonishing score, with all its grand gestures and innumerable subtleties, remains a source of potential and innovation for performers and directors. *Salome* has an undeniably powerful effect on audiences and the work's posterity is certain, as it continues to provoke excited and thoughtful discussions in the operatic sphere.

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